

## Chapter 64 - Screaming Eagles

When he had finished shooting the SAW, the Gunny walked back to the Armory, talked with the Chief Armorer, and brought out a huge Pelican case and an ammo box full of Lake City Match ammo. He set it up on the table, then swore Ron to secrecy. “If the JSOC knew you were shooting this gun, he’d have puppies if he were in a good mood, and he’d bust me to Private if he were in a Bad mood. We’re doing a T&E for Barrett Rifles and Swarovski Optiks for a new sniper rifle based on the Barrett’s light 50 or the M82A1. They had some ideas when they produced the XM107, and wanted to push the envelope again. Swarovski had some ideas about optics they wanted to try out, and Barretts was curious just how precise and accurate a rifle they could build for the BMG 50. This weapon only shoots Lake City Match Ammo, and hasn’t been seen outside this compound. I’ll have some targets set up from 600 to 1000 yards. Here’s the ballistic tables we have worked up so far on this gun and ammo. If you want to, we’d love your unofficial evaluation of this rifle. Your comments will probably make it to the report, attributed to another of the evaluators. You want to do this Ron?”

“Where do I sign?”

The Gunny laughed, and while he set up the gun, a runner was dispatched to set up targets at 600-1000 yards. The Armorer handed Gunny his spotting scope, which he set up on a table quite a distance away.

“Ron, the Barretts M82A3 came with a Swarovski 10x42mm fixed scope with a BDC. The optics lab at Swarovski had an idea for a 10-25x 80mm zoom lens with apochromatic coatings and other enhancements. Basically the scope costs more than the gun, and the gun should sell if it ever came on the market for over 10 grand. I want you to put on these shooting gloves to keep your finger oils off the gun, and here’s a special set of earmuffs that allows you to hear range commands, and suppresses loud noises by 40dB. Trust me, the L82A2 is loud. You see that huge muzzle brake on the end - it looks like it belongs on a tank. If you’re within 20 feet to the right or left of this gun, you WILL feel the muzzle blast. I’m going to set up on this other table with a wireless microphone that is set up to your headset, so I can spot and adjust for you if necessary. Your headset has a boom mike, and a push-to-talk switch that you can tape to the stock. Make sure you don’t touch it unless you want to talk, otherwise, I might wind up hard of hearing. The gun looks almost identical to the M82A3, but if you had them side by side, the barrel is longer and free-floated. The barrel has been air gauged, and the chamber hand cut to the exact size of the Lake City Match Ammo. Matter of fact, Lake City sent part of this lot of ammo to Barretts just so they could cut the chamber exactly right. The box magazine holds 10 rounds, and you should wait a couple of minutes between magazines to allow the barrel to fully cool.”

By the time Gunny had finished explaining things, the targets were set up, and Ron had

made all the adjustments to the gun, including the monopod in the buttstock, and had the bullseye of the 600 yard target firmly in his crosshairs. He was waiting on Gunny, who gave him the all clear. Ron loaded the first round, and was having a hard time calming down. Finally he started reciting the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm, and that worked. He went into his deep breathing technique, and noticed for the first time the sight wiggling slightly with each heartbeat. He remembered Anne saying something about shooting between heartbeats, but never experienced it. He was experiencing it right now. He had dry fired the weapon a couple of times to get a feel for the trigger break, and it was set very light at just over 2 pounds. He flicked the safety off, and took a firing grip. He took 2 additional deep breaths, and took a 3<sup>rd</sup> one, blew half of it out and held it right as the scope settled on the bullseye. His heartbeat was causing the image to wiggle slightly, so he anticipated the beats, and shot between them. The trigger broke like a glass rod, and even with the headset, the gun roared and kicked like a 12-gauge on Steroids. 3 seconds later, he heard the Gunny's voice over the intercom. "I don't believe this Ron, you just hit the bullseye. Go ahead and fire 2 more rounds whenever you are ready, then reload and acquire the 800 yard target."

Ron steadied down, and fired 2 more rounds. They both found the bullseye, but the group size was larger than Ron had anticipated. The gunny told Ron that he had just shot an 8 inch group at 600 yards. Ron unloaded the gun to allow it to cool quicker with the bolt locked open, and reset for the 800 yard target. He consulted the ballistic table, and added the recommended elevation to the scope setting. When the barrel had fully cooled, he got behind the gun, loaded a fresh magazine, and waited for the Gunny to give him permission to shoot. While he was waiting, he started reciting the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm. Finally the Gunny gave him the all clear, and he cleared the safety, and took a firing grip on the rifle, then cycled the action, loading a round. He adjusted the magnification and focus slightly on the scope to have a clear image of the target, then settled down to shoot just like before. Ron was totally surprised when the trigger broke, but he wasn't surprised when the Gunny told him the round struck the bullseye. Gunny told him to fire 2 more rounds, then the Gunny said that he had shot a 10-inch group at 800 yards. He asked Ron if he wanted to try the 1000 yard target. Ron said sure and they set up for the 1000 yard target as the gun cooled. Meanwhile the Gunny was going out of his tree; this kid was shooting bullseye groups at 800 yards as if he did it every day.

When the gun cooled, Ron loaded another magazine, and dialed in the drop for 1,000 yards based on the ballistic table. While he waited for the All Clear, he dialed up the magnification again, and adjusted the focus. When the Gunny radioed All Clear, he cleared the safety, cycled the action, and took a firing grip on the gun. Ron was amazed at how the target danced in the scope. This was going to be a real challenge just to hit the target. He knew that dialing up the magnification wouldn't help, he could see the target, just fine, it was just that it was bobbing and weaving like a drunk. He pressed the PTT button on his radio headset. "Gunny, the target is bobbing and weaving like a drunken prizefighter."

"Ron, that happens - you're aiming a rifle at an object that is over half a mile away. The

only reason you can see it is the huge magnification of the scope. Just steady down and do your best. My best suggestion is to trip the trigger right before the rifle crosses the center of the bullseye. It takes a fraction of a second, called lock time, between when you touch the trigger, and when the primer ignites the powder, then another fraction of a second while the round leaves the barrel, during that whole time, you can influence the movement of the bullet. Once it leaves your barrel, it's on a ballistic arc to the target. You need to anticipate slightly and lead the target."

"OK Gunny, thanks for the pep talk."

Ron settled down again, and noticed the image wasn't swinging as wildly, just oscillating slightly in a figure 8. Maybe he had just to calm down a little. As he went into his deep breathing technique, the oscillations got smaller and smaller. Right when the sight was entering the bullseye, Ron touched the trigger, and after a few seconds, Gunny yelled, "Kid, I don't know how you did it, but you hit the bullseye."

A few minutes later, Gunny decided to have some fun with Ron "Hey Ron, you see that fly on top of the 1,000 yard target?"

Ron replied "Which One? The Brown one of the Black one?"

Gunny laughed and played along "The Brown One. Shoot it in the eye."

Ron called back "Which Eye?"

Gunny nearly fell off his stool laughing, then realized that if he could see it, Ron just might be able to shoot it.

They repacked the Barretts, and Gunny was talking With the Chief Armorer. The only thing Ron heard was a name "Carlos Hathcock". Ron wondered how he was being compared to the famous Marine Sniper. He hoped he was almost as good as the legendary sniper. What Ron didn't realize was that it was field craft, not shooting ability that separated the wannabes from the real snipers. All the snipers in the program had to shoot to a certain level. The ones that washed out usually weren't due to shooting problems. When Gunny took Ron back to his family, he was still shaking his head. Steve wondered where Ron had been, but didn't ask, he was sure he would hear about it from the Gunny later. He had heard some suspiciously loud booms. Since Roy and Anne were getting tired, and Steve didn't have anything planned for the rest of the afternoon, he drove them back to quarters and then sat around and talked for a while. Later he sprang an idea on Roy and Anne. Since Ron was underage, he needed their permission for him to fly back seat in an F-15 Strike Eagle. Jim's eyes got huge. If he had been 30 years younger, he would have killed someone to get to fly in the Eagle. Roy and Anne were too tired to argue, and signed the papers. Ron was having the time of his life, and they didn't want to stand in his way.

The next morning, Steve and Ron did their PT, plus the entire Pave Hawk Command. Ron was a little intimidated working out with all these soldiers, but focused on Steve. When they finished, the Sergeant complimented him on his form. "When my uncle came to our cabin, I worked out with him for 2 weeks straight, and I tried to do it just like he did."

"You did well, Son. We'd be honored to have you lead the run."

Ron realized the Sergeant wasn't kidding, and almost said "Yes Sir" when he remembered the Sergeant was a Noncom, so he took the safe route "Yes Sergeant." and walked to the head of the formation. With the Sergeant's "Platoon Follow the Kid in front" command, they started off at a jog/trot. As his muscles limbered up, Ron started pushing the pace. He had run much faster than this when he ran with his Uncle, and they were carrying a lot more too. After another 100 yards, he had them up to what was known as a "Ranger Run" pace they could hold forever. Basically it was the fastest jog that the Rangers could accomplish while loaded with gear. Lightly loaded the average Ranger could run a marathoner into the ground. They stopped at 5 miles in deference to the admin pukes in the back, living up to their nicknames. Steve was impressed; Ron must have kept in shape since the last time they were together. The Sergeant didn't let up yet, and ordered "Platoon Quick march" and the platoon slowed to a march, and marched back to the assembly area. When they reached their assembly area, the Sergeant called "Platoon HALT", then "Dismissed". Steve walked over to Ron as did the Sergeant. Steve was beaming with pride "I see you kept up your PT when I was away?" "Yes Sir" (smart Kid - Steve was wearing his rank)

The Sergeant wondered how a 14-year old kid could be so smart, turned out and disciplined. Then he remembered that Steve was his Uncle, and the kid probably had a case of hero worship, like most teenage boys develop. Well, he could do worse for a role model. He had only heard of some of the stuff Steve had done while a PJ, and it gave him nightmares just thinking about it. Steve told Ron to shower and change into BDUs because he had to be at Flight Ops in 45 minutes. He highly suggested skipping breakfast. Ron thought a glass of orange juice wouldn't hurt, and grabbed a quick can of OJ before hitting the showers from the mini-refrigerator in his room. 5 minutes later, he was showered and getting dressed. When he finished, Roy knocked on his door and sat Ron down.

"Son, you have made me so proud this couple of days, but as you can see, your "old man" is getting older and slower in his old age. When you get back from your flight, make sure you come back here and tell us all about it." Roy gave Ron a big hug, and prayed over him briefly, asking God to protect him. They both said Amen, and then Ron said he had to go, Steve was waiting to drive him to Flight Ops. Roy gave him one last hug, then Ron hurried out. He wondered what was wrong with his dad, he had always been so youthful and strong. When he got back, if he was still feeling like that, he'd mention it to Steve. Roy would hate to get poked and prodded, but if something was wrong, besides growing old, he owed it to his mom to keep Roy around as long as possible. Steve was waiting in his Hummer at the bottom of the steps. Ron jumped in, and as soon as he was belted in, Steve took off.

5 minutes later, Ron was at Flight ops getting fitted for a flight suit, and a gee-suit. While they were fitting him, a Pilot Safety Specialist was giving Ron his canned safety speech, explaining all the safety gear in his kit, including his water survival kit, since most of Florida was within 5 minutes flying time of water. Ron laughed when they handed him a .38 revolver. Ron thought to himself, "What am I to do with this, shoot a shark?" Ron knew more about Survival from his Dad than this airman giving a canned speech seemed to know. When he finished, Ron signed his life away. His parents had already signed, but the protocol said that the airman needed the person going up for a check ride needed to sign, so Ron signed.

When he was finished, the IP that was going to fly the plane came in, and had a hard time believing Ron was only 14. He didn't look as young as most 14 year olds. He had the poise and self-confidence that some 18-year old airmen lacked. He gave him his briefing, including his canned joke that if he said "Eject, Eject, Eject." and he said "Huh?" he would be flying his first and only solo. What the pilot didn't tell the check rider is he set the seats so the pilot's ejection handle controlled both seats, with an emergency override in case the pilot was injured and couldn't grab the controls. All the GIB had to do to fire both seats manually was to pull and twist his handle. It took a deliberate act, and was a safety feature to keep the civilian from freaking out and punching them out of a perfectly good airplane. As a further safety precaution, they never told the civilian the procedure until they needed to use it. The IP asked Ron if he had any questions, and when he said NO, the pilot turned and shook his hand. They took a picture at that moment, figuring it would be better to get one now in case the civilian lost his cookies in the air, and soiled his flight suit. Steve handed him a helmet, and Ron followed the pilot out to the plane. This was where the pilot did his real talking "Steve told me you've just about got your Private Pilot's license, and if you were 16, you would have it. That's impressive, I didn't get my private license until I was 18. Just remember things happen much faster in a jet. Have you done any aerobatics?"

"Not deliberately." then Ron told him about the hairy stall recovery. The pilot's estimation of Ron went up a few notches.

"How would you like to perform a bunch of aerobatics?"

"Sure as long as it didn't get you in trouble."

"Son, the only way I could get in trouble was to hurt you or the plane. If you really want to do aerobatics, I need to extend the flight by about an hour, fly out to a tanker, and then out to the training area so we don't conflict with civilian traffic. Most of the flight will be over water."

"So what are we waiting for - let's Go."

The Pilot told Ron, "by the way, my call sign is Hammer. If you need to say anything to me

once we're in the plane, please call me Hammer."

They got to the plane, and the crew chief got Ron seated, the belts adjusted and got him all plugged in, then seated the pilot and plugged him in. The last thing he did was remove the safety pins from the seats, and showed the cotter pins to the pilot, climbed back down and removed the ladder. Then he snapped a perfect salute, which the pilot returned. The pilot's voice could be heard over the intercom. "Ron, I'm set up hot mike for the intercom, and your mike is cold. If you need to say anything, push the PTT button in your hand. You can't be heard over the air, only me. so don't worry about what you say. Ready to go?"

"Yes Sir Hammer."

Hammer started talking his way through the preflight. While Ron couldn't see the gauges, he had a set of instruments in front of him, but was told not to touch anything except the PTT button on his microphone. Somehow, most of it sounded familiar. Finally he got to the good part "Starting One" and a few seconds later "Starting Two". Even with the helmet, the noise of the engines was audible. Finally, after some more instrument checks, and a check of control surfaces and engine controls, the Pilot came over the air. "Ok, here we go - make sure your seatbelts are fastened, and your seats are in the upright and locked position." Hammer was laughing his head off, then said "Just preparing for my future employment in the Friendly Skies." Ron was laughing too, then Hammer called the tower. "Tower, this is Hammer for an aerobatic demonstration flight with Civilian passenger, Contact Shamu and advise we wish to tank as soon as we reach altitude."

"Roger Hammer, will advise, Winds out of the west, you are cleared for high-performance takeoff and climb to angels 30 to meet up with Shamu, then you are cleared direct to training area 1. Good luck and good hunting."

While he was talking to the tower, Hammer had taxied to the correct runway. "Ron, Hold on to your socks, or you might have to pick them up on the way back. Snug back into you seat, and be ready for a kick in the butt." Hammer turned down the runway, and called the tower. "Hammer, Rolling" and pushed the twin throttles to Zone 5 afterburner, and released the brakes. The lightly loaded Strike Eagle rocketed down the runway, and Hammer hauled back on the stick and snapped the gear up in a high-performance take-off with a 50 degree nose up attitude and full afterburner, they actually accelerated as they climbed. After about 10 seconds, he moved the throttles back to Military and continued the climb to 35,000 feet. Seems the military never used actual altitudes over the air. It was an old habit from WWII to keep the opposing forces from knowing the fighter's exact altitude. Angels altitudes were the called altitude, plus or minus the Angels factor to keep the enemy guessing. Even in the days of fully encrypted radio, they still kept the tradition. As he reached altitude, Hammer was on the air again. "Shamu, this is Hammer."

"Hammer, Shamu, come right 270 and we're 10 miles out, you're clear to tank."

Hammer put the F-15 into a military bank, and turned rapidly to 270. 2 minutes later they were at the tanker, and Hammer called the tanker. Receiving permission to hook up, Hammer nudged the plane forward carefully while the refueling probe was held very still in the slipstream of the big jet. When he made contact and the refueling probe slid into the connector, Hammer called “Contact, Fill her up and wash the windows. Do you give Green Stamps?”

The pilot of the KC-135 was having enough problems flying straight and level without Hammer’s attempt at humor. “Negative Hammer, transferring 40,000 pounds, and don’t quit your day job.”

When the fuel gauges indicated the internal and the external conformal tanks were full, Hammer called “Break, and thanks for the gas, Keep the change.” and backed up until the nozzle came out of the plane with a puff of jet fuel that was still in the connector, then he eased his aircraft to the right to clear the tanker, before pushing the throttle to military and heading to the training area. While they were flying straight and level, Hammer had a chance to talk to Ron. “Ron, How you doing back there son?”

“When are we going to get to do some aerobatics. I do this straight and level stuff all day.”

Hammer responded by throwing the plane into a snap roll, and recovered straight and level. “How was that?”

“Thanks Hammer I needed that, better hope the Crew chief has a strong stomach.”

Hammer knew a simple snap roll couldn’t upset Ron, and realized that the kid had a sense of humor. “Oh, funny guy aye. We’ll see how much you’re laughing in a few minutes.”

When he reached the training area, Hammer called for permission for high-performance maneuvering. That was a higher clearance than normally required for a civilian demo ride. Good thing Flight ops had insisted on the gee suit, since High-performance maneuvering allowed up to 6 positive and 3 negative Gees. Good thing Steve wasn’t in the tower, or he might have vetoed the idea, he didn’t want to scare the crap out of Ron.

A few seconds later, a simple “Roger” was all Hammer heard. Ron was wondering what he was getting into, when Hammer threw the plane into another snap roll, followed by a Split S. He was flying just this side of Air Combat Maneuvering. After a series of Rolls, he started a Cuban 8 followed by a reverse Cuban 8. Ron was glad he followed Steve’s advice, or else the Crew chief would have a huge mess to clean up. Instead of scaring Ron, the ride exhilarated him. He loved the high positive and negative Gees, and the feeling of the plane flying in unusual attitudes. When Hammer came on the air, and asked Ron how he was doing, he just said “More.” Hammer decided to go vertical, and pulled the nose up while throwing the throttles into Zone 5. While he was climbing, he performed another roll, then

an inverted inside loop at the top. He didn't want to go outside and risk a red-out. He performed a barrel roll on the way down, then turned it straight and level again. Checking his fuel state, he realized he'd either need to tank again, or cut it short. All that Zone 5 stuff gulped fuel at a prodigious rate. He decided to head for home, called the tower "Hammer, returning to base." and performed a wingover as a last surprise to Ron. Ron was loving every minute of it, and was disappointed when Hammer was obviously heading for home. he wanted more. Hammer came on the Intercom. "How you feeling back there Ron?"

"Thanks for the flight Hammer, it's too bad we couldn't do this some more."

"I know how you feel, but this Zone 5 stuff really goes through fuel, I either need to tank up or head for base. Since the Tanker has moved off, I have to go home."

"OK, thanks Hammer."

They talked all the way back until Hammer called the Tower. "Hammer requesting clearance to land. 5,000 pounds"

The fuel state told the tower that Hammer would have priority, since he would be Bingo in 10 minutes.

"Roger Hammer, cleared in to 27R, pattern is clear."

Hammer had one last thrill for Ron, and performed an aggressive Combat Break at the downwind end of the runway. Then he quickly extended flaps and dropped the gear. He got the 3 green lights indicating the gear was down and locked. He made one final call, "Hammer on final" and the Tower acknowledged, "Roger Final. Clear to land." Hammer flew such a perfect glide slope that if there were arresting gear, he would have caught a 3 wire. The plane kissed down so gently that the only indication they were down, was when the nose wheel came down, and he applied the brakes to stop the plane. Hammer taxied to the shutdown area, then slid the throttles to cutoff, shutting down the motors. He released the canopy when he saw the crew chief's smiling face. He helped Ron out first, then the Pilot. Steve was standing right there. The pilot thought he might have been in trouble until Ron ran up to his uncle, grabbed him and asked if they could do it again. Steve told Ron the next time he would do it, he would be the pilot of the plane. Ron was hooked.

He looked past Steve, and could see Roy was feeling ill when he suddenly collapsed. Ron rushed to his dad, closely followed by Steve. His PJ medical training cut in an instant, and knew Roy was having a Heart Attack. He told Ron to call on the radio for the base paramedics STAT. Ron ran over to the Hummer, and turned the radio on, and pressed the PTT button on the mike. "Medical Emergency at the Shutdown area, Paramedics requested STAT."



When the base operations operator heard the call, he pressed the EMERGENCY button that called the paramedics, and stayed with the call.

“Caller, please ID.”

“This is Ron Williams with Colonel Fellows. My Dad is having a heart attack, and Colonel Fellows is providing First Aid.”

The ops operator knew where Colonel Fellows Hummer was, and sent the paramedics to that location Code 3. They got there 3 minutes later. Steve was still working on his brother in law when the paramedics arrived and took over. They called the base hospital and called Code Blue to get the heart trauma team rolling. They started all the IV's and heart drugs, and Roy responded nicely. They packed him into the ambulance and took off Code 3 to the base hospital. Steve grabbed Anne and said that Roy should be OK, then they hustled into the Hummer and drove to the base hospital. By the time they got there, Roy had been admitted and was stable. When they got there, the base cardiologist said that Roy must be the luckiest person on the planet. If he had that heart attack in Alaska, he wouldn't have made it. As it was, it was a very mild heart attack, and he should fully recover. They wanted to keep him, and perform an angioplasty to determine what damage was done to the heart, and correct any blockages.

## Chapter 65 - Wings Clipped

The next morning, before Anne got there, the Base Hospital's cardiologist stopped in to see Roy. "Mr. Williams, I'm Dr. Wilson, the Cardiologist. You gave us quite a scare yesterday, but you seem to have come through no worse for the wear. From what we can tell, your electrolytes got out of whack between the heat and humidity. You probably weren't drinking enough water, and you had a Fibrillation incident, where your heart started fibrillating, or beating out of sync. Your brother in law assumed you were having a MI, or a heart attack, and started CPR, which didn't hurt, and might have saved your life. When the paramedics arrived 3 minutes later, they put a stethoscope to your chest and could hear your heart fibrillating, and grabbed the defibrillator. They zapped you and got you on Ringer's lactate to get your electrolytes back in balance. By the time they got you to the hospital, you were stable, so we did an echocardiogram, and the heart was fine, but you had a partial blockage, so we scheduled an angiogram, which confirmed the partial blockage. We then did a balloon angioplasty, which cleared the blockage. You only damaged less than 2% of your heart due to the partial blockage, but you need to change your lifestyle if you want to live any longer. First of all, you need to walk an hour per day. Not at first, but work up to it. Second of all, you need to change your diet. You need to eat more fish and less red meat. Your triglycerides and Cholesterol were off the chart. Your Cardiac Risk Ratio was over 8 - meaning you were a dead man walking, and your triglycerides were over 400. We bought you some time, but if you don't change the way you live, your next heart attack will kill you. I've left detailed instructions with Anne. Take care and I hope I never see you again."

"Doc - why do you hope to never see me again?"

"That's what I say to all heart patients I see in the ER, because if I see them again, they are probably on death's doorstep because they didn't listen. So I hope I never see you again."

"Same to you doc."

The doctor walked out and closed the door, and Roy went back to sleep. Meanwhile Anne, Ron and Steve were getting briefed by the ER Resident about what happened, and what changes Roy would have to make.

"Roy was exceptionally lucky. The hot weather imbalanced his electrolytes enough to cause fibrillation, and he fainted. When we got him to the ER, he was stable, so we did an Echocardiogram and located a partial blockage. We cleared the blockage with a balloon angioplasty. His electrolytes were all out of whack, and his cholesterol and triglycerides were way too high. He'll live another 20 years if he takes care of himself. That means no more red meat, fish or chicken only, and he has to walk every day, and eat a balanced diet. No heavy lifting for the first couple of months and he needs to take it easy after that."

“We live in the middle of nowhere Alaska, if he has another heart attack, it could kill him. Should we move?”

“If he follows doctor’s orders, he might never have any other problems with his heart, this was a wake-up call and there was almost no damage to the heart. Except for his triglycerides and Cholesterol, he’s in remarkable shape for his age. So there is no reason to move right now.”

When he finished, the Doctor’s pager went off, and he looked at it, and then ran for the ER. Knowing that Roy was still in his room, Anne knew the emergency page wasn’t about him. Anne told Ron to go with his Uncle Steve, and enjoy the rest of his visit. Anne wanted to stay with Roy until he was well enough to go home. Steve got up and gave his sister a big hug, and whispered something in her ear. She smiled and turned to Ron and gave him a big hug. “Don’t you worry about your Dad, he’s doing fine, it’s just he’s not used to this hot humid weather, and it stressed his heart. He’ll be as good as new when we get him home. He’ll have to modify his diet, but he should be OK pretty quick as soon as he regains his strength. The anesthesia takes a lot out of you. Go have fun, and I’ll see you in a day or two.”

Ron gave his mom a big hug, and took off with Steve. He had told Anne not to worry; he’d keep Ron so busy that he wouldn’t have time to worry about his father. Once they were outside of the Hospital, he asked Ron if he wanted to do some more shooting. Ron’s eyes lit up, and his head nodded vigorously. Steve pulled out his cell phone and made a couple of quick phone calls, then they got into his air-conditioned Hummer and drove to the range. When they got there, Ron was surprised by the number of men there. Steve explained that he had contacted his Sniper training cadre from the various commands. It seemed word had spread around the base about his shooting skills, and his age. They all wanted to shoot with him, and possibly learn something and maybe teach Ron something about long distance shooting. Ron realized he was being put on display, but was too impressed with all the medals he saw to care. The armorer had brought his Browning A-bolt BOSS .308 rifle, and a selection of military sniper rifles, including the Barretts prototype he shot the other day.

When they got out, they were practically mobbed by Delta, Ranger, and Marine Recon Sniper instructors, also couple of SEAL instructors as well. Steve got them to sit down in a semi-circle with him and Ron in the center of it, and they had a brief Q&A session. Ron gave them his background, his bio information, and everything else. Someone in Delta had already pulled his Uncle Ron’s jacket from Vietnam. Ron was one of the top 10 snipers in Vietnam, but wasn’t as famous as Carlos Hathcock or Sgt. Chuck Mawhinney. According to his jacket, most of his kills were unconfirmed, and so classified that they weren’t even in his jacket. Steve wondered how much of his shooting skills were genetic, and how much was Anne’s early training. They asked extensive questions about how he managed to shoot so well. Ron said his ability was a gift from God, and he had to do his best with every shot so as not to waste the gift. Several older sergeants in the back were nodding their heads at this, they definitely understood that kind

of drive. When they were finished, Steve asked Ron if he wanted to shoot his rifle.

Ron asked that they set up a target at the 600-yard line. He had peeked earlier, and noticed the wind was barely blowing, so he could try some Ma Bell shooting. He uncased his rifle, and carefully set it up on his shooting mat. As he always did, he shot from the Military Prone position. This amazed several sniper instructors, since none of their snipers shot Military prone anymore, and used bipods and monopods on their rifles. When he got ready, the range master made sure everyone had their eyes and ears on, and gave Ron the Thumbs up. Ron cycled the action, and looked through the scope. He was amazed at how steady the image was. 1 minute later he was so deep in the zone he didn't even remember pulling the trigger 3 times, let alone clearing and safing his rifle. The next thing he knew, the Range master had sent a runner to get his target, and they were measuring his group with a caliper. All 3 rounds were in the X-ring, and when they had finished measuring and deducting the diameter of the bullet, they started double-checking their calculations, because the calculator said he had just shot a 2-inch group at 600 yards. Steve was about to bust with pride. Ron had saved his best group for the people who would most appreciate it. Ron stood up, and was met by a raucous round of cheers. These guys who he had only read about were cheering him like he had just scored the wining touchdown in the Super bowl. Ron looked at his feet and kicked rocks in his best "Aw Shucks" impersonation. The Delta head instructor told him if he were 21, he'd buy him a beer, but if he wanted to join them at their club, he was sure they could find some soda or something he could drink. He looked over to Steve, who nodded OK.

Ron asked if they would mind if he could shoot some more. The typical response was "Heck Yeah." He put up the Browning A-bolt and picked up the prototype Barretts Sniper Rifle. This gun had an excellent bipod and monopod, so he decided to use it. He asked the range master to set a target on the 1,000-yard line, and was in the process of setting up when the Range Master gave him a thumbs up. He loaded a 5-round magazine of .50 BMG Lake City Match ammo, and cycled the action. He got into a good stable prone position, and noticed the Bipod and Monopod helped immensely, the sight was sitting right on the center of the x-ring and barely wiggling. He adjusted the focus of the scope until he could clearly see the x in the center of the x-ring, then released the safety. He took 3 deep breaths, and blew half the 3<sup>rd</sup> one out, held his breath, and squeezed the trigger right as the center of the crosshairs settled on the X of the x-ring. As soon as he was ready again, he steadied the crosshairs on the bullseye, and soon had 2 rounds in the x-ring. After the bolt locked open when the 5<sup>th</sup> round fired, he safed the weapon, and got up and finally noticed the instructors going nuts. Not sure what was going on, he took his earmuffs off, and heard them yelling and cheering. Then he noticed several of them had broken out 60-power spotting scopes. The Recon Marine sniper instructor was the first one up to him. "Ron, I don't know how you did it, but you shot a 9-inch group at 1,000 yards."

Ron said "So?"

The Marine instructor explained that his best snipers at Recon who have been shooting these

rifles for years were only shooting 8-inch groups at 1,000 yards. To shoot a 9-inch group out of an unfamiliar gun under pressure was simply amazing. Ron told him he didn't feel the pressure. "When I get ready to shoot, I can simply block out everything but the image through the scope, and sometimes I don't even remember firing."

"Ron, that's called 'The Zone' - our best shooters get into it when they shoot. It can't be taught, it's a genetic trait. You concentrate so well that I could have dropped a grenade next to you and you wouldn't have noticed. Man, if you were 3 years older, I'd sign you up on the spot. Unfortunately, Steve's already told us you are planning on going to the Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs in a few years. I'm also the coach for the Marine Shooting team, and I'm afraid the Air Force is going to win all the inter-service competitions, including the Camp Perry meet for several years after you enlist. Good luck kid, and thanks for the Shooting demonstration." Ron looked at his watch, then walked over to Steve. "Steve, can we shoot pistols for a couple of hours, we have a couple of hours of daylight left. I want to show these guys how to play .22 golf."

"Ron, that would be an excellent idea - Hey guys, let's meet over at the pistol range, Ron wants to show you how to play .22 golf - it's a neat game they played with .22 pistols at his home in Alaska."

The instructors agreed in a heartbeat. Some of them wondered if Ron was as good with pistol as a rifle. The Marine shooting coach hoped he wasn't or his team would be in major trouble. The range master cased all the weapons back up, and anticipating what he had in mind, handed Ron his Ruger 22/45 in the case and a brick of ammo. They jumped into Steve's Hummer and drove over to the pistol range. Someone at the pistol range must have been tipped off since there was a huge bucket of range balls waiting for them, and the targets had been cleared from the range. As Ron and Steve got out of the Hummer, he carried his 22/45 and the brick of ammo over to the shooting bench, uncased the gun and started loading mags. Steve exercised his pitching arm, and tossed golf balls all over the range from 15 to 50 yards away.

When the rest of the instructors walked up, they were practically drooling over his suppressed 22/45, and were full of questions. They had tried several times to purchase that exact weapon through military channels, but some idiot in supply kept killing it, saying they had plenty of suppressed weapons. Naturally, they all wanted a chance to fire it, so Ron suggested he go first, then they could shoot in the order of rank. That created some arguments until Steve stepped in and arbitrarily sorted them out into order. They were too busy watching Ron shoot to care anyway. He had 2 mags loaded full of CCI Mini-mags, and was already wearing his shooting glasses. He explained the point of the game was to shoot a golf ball underneath so it popped into the air. You got points for each time a golf ball jumped in the air, and you won instantly if you could shoot that golf ball while it was still in the air, or else you won based on total points. Ron inserted his first magazine in the weapon, and taking careful aim, shot a golf ball 15 yards away, and made it jump almost 6 inches in

the air. He tried to hit it in the air, but shot just over it. He sighted another golf ball, and made it jump too, but missed it in the air - it was hard to predict which way they would go. After 2 magazines of 15 rounds each, he had hit 13 golf balls, and he had almost hit 5 in the air. The most senior instructor went next, and soon every instructor on the base was hooked, then they realized this was a great instinctive shooting tool, since you didn't have enough time to use the sights and hit an erratically flying golf ball in the air. Several of them decided then and there to requisition a case of the Ruger 22/45 pistols with the integral Ares Suppressors, and this time they'd fight the REMF's in Supply to get them.

Ron had made a big hit with the Instructors, and the Marine coach was bummed. Evidently, Ron was as good with a pistol as he was with a rifle. When they had finished, the Delta instructors invited everyone over to their club for drinks and a bull session. Steve decided that he should go with Ron, just to make sure no one else tried to shanghai him away from the Air Force. Actually, he wanted to hang out with the instructors, but was rarely invited since he was an Air Force puke. Being Ron's uncle, the invitation extended to him as well.

Ron and Steve got into Steve's Hummer for the drive over to the Army Ranger compound. The Delta Force section was a smaller section off to a corner of the Ranger Compound. Steve followed the vehicle in front of him, and they were waved through the gate with a smart salute befitting Steve's rank. They made a couple of funny looking turns, finally stopping in front of this decrepit Quonset hut that looked like it had been through every war since WWII. A staff sergeant stood outside the door checking ID's, and only admitting a select few. The Delta Instructor walked up to the Staff Sergeant, said a few words, then escorted Steve and Ron into their private bar. Remembering Ranger protocol, Steve immediately took off his cover and stowed it, or else he would have to buy the club a drink. They were shown to a reserved section of the bar with a private entrance. Ron saw a bunch of targets posted on the wall, and asked the Instructor whose targets those were. The instructor answered with some pride that they are the qualifying targets for the best sniper student and instructor for each year. He pulled something out of a map tube, and held it up to the crowd, which yelled their approval. Ron couldn't really see what he was showing them, and was seriously surprised when the Instructor asked Ron to sign his 1000-yard target. It seems Ron was the youngest person in the history of the Rangers to shoot a 1000-yard group that didn't have to be measured with a yardstick. The next youngest person was over 10 years older than him, and his group was ½ an inch smaller than his. Ron was flattered, but tried real hard not to let it get him puffed up. The Instructors gathered around him and toasted him. Somehow someone had found a 6- pack of Coke in the cooler, and Ron was drinking from the bottle, and raised his bottle in thanks. Then they started yelling "Speech - Speech." until Steve finally got them quieted down. Ron stood up on a table so he could address them. "Gentlemen, People in the Military have always been my heroes. If it weren't for you, we wouldn't be here enjoying our freedoms. You guys have all been out and faced the dragon, I envy you. Maybe someday I can do something worthy of belonging here. I really appreciate this, but I don't deserve it. Thanks for everything."

With that, he stood down, and received a huge applause. Steve gave Ron a big hug, and told him “Ron these guys really appreciate stuff like that, I’m really proud of you.”

“Steve, it was from the heart, Guys like you and Ron and these guys all risked their lives so I can live in peace. Maybe someday, I can earn a place in a room like this. I know the only reason I’m here is I’m your nephew and a good shooter.”

The Delta Instructor overheard their conversation. “Kid, you’re not a good shooter, you’re a great shooter. Only 1 out of 1,000 Delta operatives can shoot as well as you can right now. That’s a gift. Use it well. Use it to defend Freedom.” When he finished, he shook Ron’s hand. Steve knew that they had made an indelible impression on Ron. He knew when the time came, he would choose a career in the military. He just hoped Ron wouldn’t have to make the Supreme Sacrifice, and could come home to a normal life after he retired. Steve knew that Ron’s target would be displayed prominently, as well as his age, as a motivation to future Delta Shooters. Even if he never did anything in the Military except shoot competitively, he would influence future Delta members and encourage them to shoot better. When things broke up a few hours later, Steve drove Ron back over to the VIP quarters, and ate dinner with him, since Anne was still with Roy at the base hospital. After dinner, Steve called Anne, and asked her if he could bring her anything.

She requested some food, and a blanket. Steve asked her if it was OK for Ron to come over. Anne said sure, if Steve could take him back to VIP quarters since she was spending the night there next to Roy. Steve got Anne a to-go order, and drove over to the base hospital with Ron. Roy was up and looking better. Ron ran over and gave his Dad a big hug. Roy held his son for a while, then indicated he needed to let go - he was squeezing too tight. They visited for about an hour, while Steve talked with Anne. Ron told Roy all about what he did that day. Roy’s eyes got big when Ron told him he shot a 9-inch 1000-yard group. He really was in shock when Ron told him that the Delta Instructors had invited them over to their club, and made a big deal of putting his autographed target on the wall. Roy realized what a gift his son had when Ron related what the Delta Instructor had told him. Roy knew Delta was one of the toughest teams to get into, and their shooters were top notch. When they finished, visiting hours were over, So Roy told Ron, “I love you son. You’ve made me so proud. I’ll be OK in a couple of days, so make sure you enjoy yourself, and don’t worry about me.” Ron gave his Dad another hug, then turned to leave. He gave his Mom a big hug on the way out of the hospital, and Steve took him back to VIP quarters. Steve made sure he got to his room OK, and Jim was waiting there for him, then said goodnight and left. Jim got an update, and then they got ready for bed.

## Chapter 66 - Hanging with the SEALs

The next morning, Steve dropped Ron off at the SEAL compound, and told him he'd see him in a couple of days. Ron walked to the gate, and was greeted by the CO of the SEAL team. "Ron Williams, Welcome to the SEAL's. Steve asked me to keep you busy for the next couple of days, so I've got a full schedule ahead for you. First of all, my name is Captain Bill Edwards. When we're around other SEALs or military personnel, I'd appreciate if you would call me Captain Edwards, otherwise it's just Bill. I just wanted you to know I knew your uncle Ron, so if you have any questions I can answer, just let me know. I can't tell you everything, some of the stuff he did was so classified that I can't even talk about it now."

"Captain Edwards, can you tell me what Ron was doing in Vietnam - Mom won't talk about it, and I'm dying to know what kind of man my namesake was."

"Ron, your uncle was a bona-fide hero. He started as an Army Sniper, then got recruited into MAC-SOG for duty behind lines including Cambodia. I was a 1<sup>st</sup> Lieutenant in the SEALs back then, and he saved our bacon more than once when he warned us of enemy activity in the area, and took out a Vietnamese Sniper that was waiting in ambush for us. I never met him while he was in Vietnam, but later when I was sheep-dipped to the CIA, I wound up running into him on a couple of ops, and shared a drink or two after the missions were over. He quit when he realized that the people he was sent out to kill were no worse than the people who sent him out to kill them, and the last I heard, he was flying bush in Alaska."

"Ok, Bill - I can fill you in about what happened after that. About 15 years ago, my father Roy Williams hired him to fly and guide him on a Caribou hunt in Alaska. According to my Dad, Ron got lost in the clouds around Denali, and wound up way off course about 115 miles northwest of Denali, where he crashed the plane into a lake after getting caught in a huge downdraft. My dad survived, lived for a year alone in the wilderness, then made a dugout canoe, and paddled over 100 miles back to Allakaket where he met my Mom, who was Ron's sister. Steve met Roy later that day, and Roy went back to the bush after realizing his kids were more worried about giving back the insurance money than seeing him alive. A couple of months later, a tree fell on him and he broke his arm. Steve was working as a State Doctor in Allakaket Alaska at the time, and Anne, my mom, was his nurse. Steve was all ready to go into the Air Force to become a PJ, but didn't want to leave Anne stranded, so he suggested she move in with him as a private duty nurse. They fell in love, and were married a couple of months later, and 9 months to the day they were married, I was born. We've lived in the cabin ever since. Mom taught me how to shoot as soon as I was old enough to hold a gun, and I've been shooting regularly ever since then. Since my Dad's getting up in age, the last couple of times we went hunting, I was the primary shooter, and he helped me haul the carcasses back on a cart."



“Wow, that’s some story, and it explains a lot about you. It seems some of your shooting ability is genetic, and the rest comes from growing up with rifles and learning young, then getting a lot of practice. How would you like to come out on a training run with us along the Florida coast. We have some new boats that really go fast, and then when we get back, you can try your hand in the freefall simulator. It’s a big padded room with a huge fan that pumps air straight up at over 100 mph, and we practice our freefall techniques in there. If you’d like to learn to use SCUBA gear, we have a pool and instructors that would love to teach you.”

“Sounds like fun - when do we start?”

“Let’s get you set up in barracks, and issue you some BDUs. You look like you’d fit a Men’s Small, so I ordered a couple of complete changes of clothes. There are no rank insignia on them, but I had your name stenciled on the shirts so you wouldn’t stand out like a sore thumb.” They drove in the captain’s Hummer, and were quickly at the BOQ building that Ron would be spending the next couple of days in. Someone had already laid out 5 sets of BDUs including briefs and socks, and a brand new pair of boots. The Captain showed him how to store the gear in his footlocker, then waited outside while Ron changed. Bill knew Ron was a quick study when he noticed the cuffs of his BDUs were bloused into the tops of his jump boots, and the boots were tied with a knot instead of a bow. Ron had his BDU cover in hand, and awaited Bill’s inspection at his best attempt at “attention”. Bill looked him over, and complemented him “Well done Mr. Williams, how did you know to blouse your cuffs into the jump boots like that?”

“Captain, when Steve, Excuse me Colonel Fellows, was staying with us, every morning for PT he showed up in BDUs, and he always had his pants cuffs bloused inside his boots.”

“OK, get in the vehicle, and let’s go meet the rest of the team.”

Ron ran around and got into the passenger side of the Hummer and belted himself in securely. They drove to the docks, where the biggest boat that Ron had ever seen awaited them. It looked almost like a picture of a WWII PT boat, but bigger and more rakish. There was a huge machine gun mounted in the bow, and another amidships. The boarding plank was out, and Ron waited for Captain Edwards. As he walked aboard, Ron heard a whistle, and the entire crew turned and saluted him. As he stepped aboard, he turned and saluted the flag, then the crew, and then Ron stepped aboard, was basically ignored by the crew, then he saluted the flag, like Captain Edwards had, and stepped aboard. Captain Edwards took him aside. “Ron I appreciate the gesture of saluting the flag, but you’re not military personnel, so please don’t salute anyone.” Ron nodded, and tried not to feel like he had just been snubbed. Then he remembered he was a guest here, at the invitation of his uncle, and didn’t really belong yet. He thought to himself “Someday I will belong here.” Bill handed Ron a life preserver, and showed him to a seat amidships behind the control console, and helped him buckle in the strange lap and shoulder harness, then handed him a helmet that looked a lot

like a helicopter pilot's helmet. When he put it on, Bill plugged the pigtail into the seat, and he could hear conversations aboard the boat. Bill buckled himself into the adjacent seat, then plugged in, and pressed his PTT switch. "Ron, this is Bill, I'm on the private intercom, so no one can hear us. Just press your PTT switch on the pigtail to talk to me. No one else on the boat can hear you. You'll hear me talking to the crew throughout the mission, but unless I start a sentence with RON, please don't answer. If I'm busy, please save your questions and comments for later." Ron pressed the button on his pigtail. "OK, thanks Captain." When he looked at the seat, he noticed the belts were attached to the seat, and the seat was mounted on a huge swivel pedestal to the deck by 10 1" diameter bolts. Obviously, this seat was designed to take a lot abuse and keep the occupant safe. Just as Ron started wondering what he had got himself into, a diesel engine aft rumbled to life, then the distinctive whine of twin turbine engines rose from a low whine to a scream as the twin TE-94 engines spooled up, yet they weren't as loud as he imagined with the helmet on. Ron realized the helmet was for hearing protection as well as anything else. He looked at Bill's helmet, and noticed a knob in the center of the forehead. He touched his helmet, and sure enough he had the same knob. He twisted it counterclockwise, and slid it down and a clear plastic visor slid in front of his face. Ron thought that would come in handy when the boat reached speed. As the bow and stern lines were tossed off, the bow of the boat turned away from the dock, then he felt the boat moving forward as the water jets swivelled rearward to push the boat forward. Ron reached up and slid the visor back up and locked it for now, he knew they wouldn't be going much faster than 10 knots until they cleared the anchorage. Ron swivelled around in his seat to look around. There were 12 SEALs in seats like his behind him, and there was a small crew operating the boat. Someone opened a door in the front cockpit window, and walked forward to the bow and manned the machine gun up front. Ron decided to ask Bill about it. "Captain Edwards, what's that big gun up front that the crewman just walked up to?"

"Ron, that's a 25mm Autocannon. This boat is designed to go into harms way and deliver several SEAL platoons to their targets. If you turn around, you'll see a 7.62mm GE Minigun mounted in the center of the stern. Those are the principle defensive weapons of this boat, and the boat crew mans and maintains them. While the SEALs have their own personal weapons, they carry a limited amount of ammo, so the boat has to be capable of defending itself. Under the deck are huge stores of ammo for each weapon, and they're fed by a flexible belt feed from those huge magazines. I've yet to see a Mark V come back with the magazines empty, even though they have tried. It's considered bad form to come back from a mission with full magazines, yet it's even worse to come home with empty magazines."

"Why's that Captain?"

"What if you run into another bad guy on the way home, what are you going to do, throw spit wads?"

As they cleared the channel, and headed out into the Gulf, the commander of the boat crew

spun the wheel to head toward their practice area, and advanced the throttles until they were doing over 40 knots. Ron quickly lowered his visor as the spray started kicking up. Bill handed Ron something, and he realized that it was to wipe his faceplate off with. He stuck it in the shirt pocket of his BDU, then realized it might blow out, and stuck it in his right front pocket. Every 15 minutes, he had to take it out and clean off his visor. This boat kicked up a lot of spray. An hour later, they arrived at their practice area, and he throttled back to 20 knots. Ron heard Bill's voice "Ron turn around and watch this."

As soon as the boat had slowed, the SEALs had taken off their helmets, unbuckled themselves from their seats, and made their way aft to their inflatable boats. They split up into groups of 6 and when they were all set, the guy in the bow of each boat flipped a lever, and they slid into the water. Seconds later, Ron heard the roar of twin outboards, then the noise of the turbines grew as the Mark V turned to follow them about a mile behind. Bill explained they were simulating an attack against a defended beach, and the SEALs might need the firepower of the Mark V if they got into trouble. The normal procedure was to sneak in after dark, but sometimes they had to do it the hard way, and attack in broad daylight, so they practiced this attack as well. Besides, it was the only one that an observer could appreciate, since the other attacks were done in pitch dark, and if the SEALs did their jobs right, and they usually did, there wasn't a shot fired, and the opponents never knew what hit them.

As the SEAL teams neared the beach, the Mark V hove-to about a mile off the coast, and waited for "All Hell to break loose" as Bill told Ron. The boat's portside was facing the beach, and the GE Mini-Gun and 25mm Autocannon were facing that way as well, to deliver a full broadside. As Ron watched, several Ma Deuces were brought up from underneath, and attached with tall pintle mounts to spots on the deck that were designed to accept them. A gunner's mate was carrying belted ammunition, and handed two linked belts to each gunner. They now had 2 Ma Deuce BMG 50 machine guns as well as the other guns facing shore. Suddenly, smokepots lit off on the shore to simulate enemy gunfire, and the 25mm Autocannon spoke first, firing a 5 round burst at the smoke. As more and more smokepots were activated by remote control, the other guns joined in, until the Mark V was firing a full broadside with the 25mm, 7.62mm and both Ma Deuce guns firing at the smokepots. The noise was incredible, even through the helmets. Ron knew he would be deafened and in a lot of pain if he were exposed to the noise of all those weapons firing without a helmet. All of a sudden, they all stopped firing. Bill came on the intercom, and asked Ron how he liked it. Ron said he was glad he was wearing that helmet. He never knew full-auto machine guns were so loud. Bill had an idea, and called the Chief gunnery mate, and had them relocate one of the 50's to the starboard, and kick a 50-gallon target drum over the side. The Chief nodded, and uncoupled the 50 from the port side mount, and moved it to the starboard side while 2 other gunners mates tossed a 50 gallon target barrel over the side. Bill switched to intercom. "Ron, how'd you like to try firing the 50?"

Ron's eyes got as big as saucers, and was nodding his head vigorously. Bill reached over

and unfastened his belts, then unplugged him from the seat. A gunner's mate came up and connected a small transceiver to his pigtail and stuck it in Ron's pocket. He heard Bill's voice again. "Ron, you're on hot mike, but I'm the only one who can hear you unless they are on this frequency. Go ahead and stand next to the 50 on the right, and the Chief gunner's mate will talk you through how to safely fire the weapon, but hurry up, that barrel's drifting away. Ron scurried over to the starboard side, and the Gunnery mate gave him a quick lesson on the 50. The gun was loaded and on safe, so he didn't have to mess with cocking the weapon, only aiming, releasing the safety, and firing. Ron grabbed the spade grips, and when he got the command, "Commence Firing Starboard" he touched the butterfly trigger, and fired a half-dozen rounds before he could let up on the trigger. The rounds sailed harmlessly over the barrel, so he lowered his point of aim, and shot the water 20 yards short. The gunner's mate came onto the headset. "Ron, you're on a moving boat, and your target is moving as well, you need to anticipate and lead your target. Keep your bursts short just like you're doing, and you'll get it soon enough."

Ron picked up the barrel in the sight, and finally started allowing the gun to follow the target. The swell was small enough that he could keep the barrel in his sights, and squeezed off another burst that hit the barrel. A big cheer went up from the rest of the boat crew that was muffled through his helmet. He tried again, and just missed. Finally he really steadied down and concentrated, and put a 50 round burst into the barrel, shredding it to the point that it sank. Ron was disappointed since he still had part of a belt left. He safed the weapon and took his hands off the grips, allowing the barrel to point skyward off the starboard side. Bill called him and told him to take his helmet off. When he took it off, and looked around, the entire boat crew, and the 2 SEAL teams who had re-boarded the craft were cheering. Ron was amazed, he never heard the boats coming back aboard. Bill was amazed, no gunner's mate had learned to shoot the 50 that fast and that well. The barrel was a good 500 yards out when he started hitting it, and then he put 50 rounds into it, and sank it with maybe 50 rounds out of a 200 round belt still left. Bill told Ron to get in his seat and get his helmet on, they had a long trip back. Ron handed the transceiver back to the Chief Gunner's mate, and put his helmet back on, and sat in the seat. When he plugged in, he was hearing comments like "Sierra Hotel - Damn that kid's good." He tried not to get a swell head as he buckled himself back in, and got ready for the return trip. As soon as he was belted in, the Boatswain turned the boat back to MacDill and shoved the throttles to the stops. The boat accelerated from 0-50 knots within a quarter mile, and was practically flying over the small chop in the Gulf as they roared back home.

When they got back to the dock, Bill offered to show Ron below decks. Bill opened a hatch and descended a steep ladder. Ron followed carefully. When they got to the bottom, the could see 2 hatches, one leading fore and one leading aft. Bill unlocked the hatch leading aft, and stepped over the 6-inch sill. Bill told Ron to watch his step, and pay attention to overheads and obstructions from here on out, since the space was going to get real cramped. They walked past a huge turbine engine, then turned a corner. The Chief Machinist Mate was sitting at a console monitoring the engines. Since they were shut down, there was

nothing to monitor, but that was the only space below decks and aft he could sit. Bill asked him to explain the engines to Ron.

“Ron, name’s Slim. These 2 big monsters here are the turbines that are the prime movers of this here boat. Between them you see that hunk of metal? That’s a Detroit Diesel. It is used to start these monsters with the APU, then once they’re running, it powers a huge generator for all the power this tub uses. Each of these turbines produces up to 2,300 horsepower, and all that energy is sent through these shafts underneath your feet to those huge jet pumps in the rear. As you saw on the way home, at full throttle, we can accelerate from a dead stop to over 50 knots inside about a quarter mile. About 6 feet behind your head is the magazine for the 7.62mm GE Minigun. Fully loaded, it carries over 50,000 rounds. If you were to go up to the bow, but it’s too crowded in there to let you see it, is another magazine with 5,000 rounds of 25mm ammo for the autocannon. I heard you did pretty good with the 50 up there, Well done son.” With that, Slim turned around and went back to work, and the tour was over. Bill lead him back up on deck, and escorted him off the boat, and back to his Hummer. Looking at his watch, Bill realized it was about time for Dinner. “Ron, how’d you like to eat dinner with the SEALs?”

Ron remembered he was hungry and nodded. Bill drove over to the chow hall, and Ron followed him inside. To say the atmosphere inside was boisterous would have said that a Soccer Riot was a Minor Brawl. Ron picked up a tray and followed Captain Edwards. After filling his tray, he followed Bill to a seat near the teams he was with earlier. As Captain Edwards approached the table, the entire team stood silently and waited for the Captain to take his seat. Ron made sure he was the last to be seated, even though he was right next to the captain. He had managed a few bites when the questions started.

“Hey Ron, we were amazed at how you shot that 50 today. Ever shot one before?”

“No Sir, That was the first time I’d shot anything that was full-auto.”

Captain Bill interrupted. “Ron’s being modest - yesterday he was firing that Barrett’s Light 50 prototype at the 1,000 yard range. The Rangers put his target up on the wall.” A chorus of “Sierra Hotels” echoed around the table.

Ron leaned over to the Captain and whispered “Excuse me Captain, but what does Sierra Hotel mean?”

Captain Edwards almost coughed up a piece of steak he was laughing so hard. Evidently, someone had left a crucial part of his education into the Military Mystique out.

“Ron, Sierra Hotel is two letters in Military Phonetic Alphabet. It’s a statement someone says when they are seriously impressed. It means “Sh\$t Hot”.

Ron whispered back “Sir, I still don’t get it.” Bill whispered back “I’ll explain later.”

## Chapter 67 - Flying with the Eagles

The next morning, they convoyed from Tampa Bay to Orlando Florida, where a company called SkyVentures had a Vertical Wind Tunnel capable of generating wind velocities of 120mph. The SEALs used it as a skydiving facility, and paid an annual fee to the owners to use it before the official opening time of 2:00 pm daily. They arrived at 0800 sharp, suited up, and while they were suiting up in their “flying suits” and helmets, Ron was receiving a safety briefing and instructions in how to fly in the wind tunnel. They knew he was a Student Private Pilot, so they couched the training in those terms. He was excited to get into the wind tunnel, and try flying without a plane. He watched a demonstration by the SEALs, including members of the LeapFrogs, the SEAL Parachute Demonstration team. They put on about a 15-minute performance of advanced skydiving techniques, including various formations. When they were finished, Ron was more than ready to try it. When the chamber was cleared, Ron entered with 2 instructors who would be responsible for his safety. They stood on the mat and the fan got up to speed, and just like he had been told, he jumped forward when the green light came on indicating the wind tunnel was up to speed, and he was flying. His first flight only lasted a few seconds, but after a dozen attempts, he was staying in the air column for a minute at a time. Then they shut the tunnel down, and he walked outside to give some other SEALs a chance.

The 2 instructors asked him if he wanted to do some formation flying, and he agreed in a heartbeat. There was a huge concrete pad out back and creepers to practice maneuvers on the ground before they flew them. Ron would “jump” first, then the instructors would link up on him, and one would catch his hands, and the other his feet, and fly like that for as long as possible. Then they would do the same maneuver, but Ron would spin himself in the air, and switch his hands and feet while the instructors remained stationary. After that, he could practice solo flying as long as he wanted. They walked back into the simulator, and when the green light came on, Ron jumped first, got into a good stable flying position, then the 2 instructors jumped in with him, and they quickly established the first formation. They released Ron, who spun exactly as the instructor had told him by barely moving a hand, and they caught him and they were flying again. A couple of minutes later, the turbine was spinning down, and they floated to the safety mat. During the next session, Ron decided to just have fun, and was doing some pretty strange maneuvers in the wind tunnel. He was using his knowledge of aerodynamics to bend, twist, and turn into different shapes that resulted in some interesting maneuvers. He wound up in a Delta Position, which they had warned him about, and started flying toward the wall. His recovery wasn’t very elegant, but he managed not to cream his face into the wall at 20 mph. He just kissed it, and recovered well enough to keep flying instead of sliding down the wall. He decided that he had enough of “creative flying” and decided to just sit there in the air stream and enjoy the experience. When the turbine spun down this time, he was ready to go. Several of the SEALs teased him good-naturedly on the way out, and he knew that he had arrived. He wasn’t a SEAL by any means, but he had done well enough at something they did to earn enough respect to get

them to accept him as a “kid brother”. By the end of the day, Ron was so tired he slept in the van all the way back home to MacDill. In deference to his exhaustion, they took it easy the rest of the afternoon.

The next day, Bill asked Ron if he wanted to learn how to Scuba Dive. Ron admitted he couldn't even swim. Bill said “No time like the present” and tossed him an official pair of SEAL shorts, a BDU shirt, and a set of aqua shoes that he could wear in and out of the water. Ron looked funny in the shorts, since he was a skinny white kid, and had never bothered to get a tan. They got out of the Hummer, and this huge SEAL was waiting there for them. Bill introduced them, and then the Instructor said “What are you waiting for, get in the water.”

“I can't swim.”

“Don't worry, the water isn't deep enough for you to drown. All you have to do is to stand up.”

Ron said “OK” and jumped in. He stood there in the pool and said , “Now what?”

“You can't swim at all?”

“Not a lick.”

“OK, grab the side of the pool, put your right hand on the lip, and the other about 1 foot below the water and lay with your face in the water, and kick your feet. To breathe, turn your face to the side of the arm that is under water, and keep kicking. A nice steady rhythmic kick is what we're looking for. When you're doing it right, you should feel you have to push against the wall with your lower arm to keep from running into the wall. Make sure you hold your breath while your face is under water. OK, now assume the position, and start kicking. Ron started doing exactly as the SEAL told him, and pretty soon, he had to push pretty hard to keep his face off the side of the pool. He heard a whistle blow, and stopped.

“OK, you've got that part down. Now I'm going to get in the water with you and show you the arm half. This stroke, when put together is called the Australian Crawl or Freestyle. It's fast but tiring. When we get you outfitted with fins, mask, snorkel, etc. you won't need to use your hands, but you really can't call yourself a swimmer until you can do 100 yards of Freestyle in under 1 minute. This pool is kind of small, but later if you get in a 50-meter pool, you might try it until you can get under a minute. OK, here's the arm stroke.”

The instructor got into the water with Ron, and showed him the arm sequence, and how to breathe. Ron put the whole thing together in about 10 minutes. The instructor, told Ron his name was Bear, since that's what the other SEALs called him. He told Ron to try 4 laps

across the long way of the pool. Ron struck out, and did pretty good for a beginner. He wasn't fast, but then again, he didn't drown either, and didn't freak out when he got in the deep water, he just kept plugging away. When he got back, Bear was a little less grouchy. "OK, let's try treading water. Just do what I do." Ron could see what Bear was doing, and 2 minutes later, he was treading water.

"OK, let's see how you float. Lay on your back with your arms spread out, and your feet together. You should float OK, since you were pretty flat in the water when you were swimming." Ron laid back, and almost fell asleep he was so relaxed. 5 minutes later, the whistle blew, and Ron realized he had dozed off. "NO napping in the pool - get your butt up on deck and help me with this gear." Ron swam over to the edge, and climbed out. There were 2 tanks with octopus regulators on them, and BC Jackets. Next to them were 2 sets of masks, fins, and snorkels. Bear had him carry everything over to the water's edge, then climb back into the water. Bear followed, then showed Ron how to put the mask, fins, and snorkel on, then showed him how to use them in the pool. Ron thought it was pretty cool that he could swim with his face underwater and still breathe. Moving around the pool with the fins was much easier, and freed his hands to do stuff. Finally, they swam back into the shallow end. Bear reached up and picked up Ron's gear and helped him into the BC Jacket, then showed him how to buckle into it. When he was settled into the water, Bear strapped his tank on quickly, then showed Ron the rest of his gear. He took the high pressure hose attached to the second stage of the regulator/mouthpiece, and put it over Ron's right shoulder, then the rest of the hoses went over his left shoulder. He turned the air valve on, had Ron make sure he was getting air out of the regulator, then showed him the rest of the controls, how to read the pressure gauge mounted into the console with the compass and dive computer on the back, and showed him how to operate the BC. "Push this button to go up, and this one to go down. It uses some air, but kicking hard to maintain depth uses more. For the pool, since it's only 12 feet deep and you're not wearing a wetsuit, I'm going to skip the weights. Tomorrow, when I take you diving to a real pretty reef in the keys, I'll have you wear a 4-3 suit and carry about 6 pounds of weight to compensate for the buoyancy of the neoprene suit. This should be fun. OK, put your mask on, check your seal, then stick the regulator in your mouth, and follow me."

With that, Bear turned and dove toward the deep end. Ron followed a split second later, managing to keep his regulator, mask, and gear all where it belonged. He found the going much easier if he put his arms to his side and used a long slow flutter kick without a lot of knee. Bear sat down in what looked like a lotus position on the bottom of the pool, and Ron followed. His ear was bothering him, and remembered what Bear had said, and pinched his nose to clear his Eustachian tubes. The pain went away immediately, and he settled on the bottom next to Bear, and just sat there breathing and looking around. Bear was pleased that Ron was perfectly comfortable breathing under water, some people freaked out and couldn't do it. So far so good. They swam around for a while, then surfaced.

"OK, Ron, you seem pretty calm down there. We need to work on your emergency drills,



like clearing your mask, buddy breathing, and a couple of other things I'm sure I'll think of later. If your mask gets dislodged under water, you have to know how to clear it. Buddy Breathing used to be a pain, but with the new octopus regulators and the buddy regulator, it's as easy as picking up your buddy's spare regulator, and breathing. Your spare also would come in handy if your regulator was ever damaged, and would not work."

Bear showed him how to clear his mask, how to buddy breathe, and then they went to the bottom of the pool to practice. First Ron took his mask off, put he flooded mask back on, then cleared it by breathing out his nose while pushing on one side of his mask to create a leak on the other that would drive out the water. Then he tapped Bear on the shoulder, thumped his chest in the "out of air" signal, and took Bear's buddy, then dropped his, and breathed from Bear's buddy. Then they reversed the procedure. Bear pointed his thumb up, and they went to the surface. "Ron, you've done great so far. Let's spend the rest of the afternoon fishing stuff out of the pool and playing diver games." He reached out of the pool for his bag of toys, and tossed them into the pool. First they played underwater hockey, with a 6" stick and a 3" puck. They had to swim along the bottom of the pool, pushing the puck with a short stick. When they got tired of that, they tried some other games. Finally, Bear looked at his pressure gauge and his watch, and realized they had been down almost 2 hours. If they wanted to dive tomorrow, they needed to get up to the surface soon. Bear got Ron's attention, then gave the thumb up signal, and slowly rose to the surface. When Ron stood up in the shallow end, he realized that he was real tired. Bear explained that breathing under water is hard work all by itself, but it is worth it. Tomorrow, they would dive a shallow reef, that was about 30-40 feet down. Bear helped Ron out of his gear, and told him to eat some dinner, make sure he drank plenty of water, and see him back there at 0800 tomorrow, and they would go diving at a beautiful reef. Ron staggered out to the Hummer, where Bill was waiting. "So how was it?"

"Great, but I'm more tired than when I hauled those 3 caribou back to the cabin."

Bill didn't know what to say, Caribou weighed almost 1,000 pounds each.

Ron told Bill that he had to eat dinner, drink plenty of water, and be back there at 0800, because Bear wanted to take him reef diving. Bill was astounded. No one but SEALs called Bear by his Team name. Ron must have made an impression on him.

The chow hall was just as chaotic as it was yesterday, but Ron was ready for it. He fell in line behind Bill, and followed him to a table. Again the SEALs stood when Bill arrived, and Ron made sure he was the last one seated. The SEALs asked Ron what he had done that day. He told them about how Bear was teaching him to dive, and that he hadn't even swam before. One of the SEALs was incredulous "You never swam before?"

"I'm from the Interior of Alaska. The warmest the water gets in summer is maybe 40 degrees." Several SEALs started laughing, not at Ron, but at the image of a kid trying to

swim in 40-degree water, and coming out as a Popsicle. Then Ron told them that Bear was taking him diving tomorrow to a shallow reef he knew about. Several SEALs knew where he was talking about, and suggested that he borrow their underwater camera. One of them had an inexpensive camera that would work great up to 100 feet, and didn't weigh a ton like the other SEAL's \$4,000 underwater Hasselblad medium format camera. When they finished dinner, Ron was tired and wanted to go straight to bed. He hit the showers, then practically fell into his bunk. His alarm went off at 0600 the next morning, he took a quick shower, then walked over to the Chow hall. Evidently they must have known about Ron, since no one said anything to him to indicate they didn't recognize him. He didn't eat a heavy breakfast, but made sure he ate enough since he felt he would need the energy. When he was finished, Bill was waiting out front, and drove him over to the dock where Bear was waiting with the boat all ready to go. Bill handed him one of the SEAL's underwater camera, and took off. Ron walked to the edge of the gangplank, and called out "permission to board?"

Bear looked up smiling "Permission Granted - welcome aboard. Help me stow this gear, and we'll get underway. Good thing you're early, I could use the help."

They got the gear stowed, and Bear started the twin diesels, and told Ron to take a seat next to the wheel so they could talk, it was a long ride out. He was driving the base's harbor patrol boat, or at least that's what it was before the team converted it to their dive boat. It had a fairly low freeboard, which was perfect for diving, and could make 40 knots with both engines running wide open, but cruised better at 30 knots. They had installed an air compressor with a 3-stage filter, and a full galley below. One of the first things installed was a seaworthy coffee maker, since some of the SEALs were Naval Chiefs, and a Chief lived on coffee. There was even a fresh-water shower and bunks forward. It had a full navigation suite including Radar, GPS, and LORAN, as well as Marine and Military radios. Bear had already programmed their destination and waypoints based on the charts into the GPS, and all they had to do was follow the directions. Ron was watching Bear navigate, and asked him all sorts of questions. Bear was real patient, and answered all his questions. He even showed Ron how to run the navigation gear. When they got to the dive site, Bear threw out the anchors, and Ron went below to get dressed. 10 minutes later, Ron came up on deck wearing a red 4-3 full-length wetsuit. Bear went downstairs and came back in 10 minutes wearing a green 4-3 suit. He walked over to the tank rack, and took 2 High-Pressure 80 steel tanks out and put a pressure tester on them and made sure they were full. Then he put the regulators on both, and checked them. They were working fine, and he mounted them in their BC's then handed one of the tanks to Ron. Ron put on his tank, and checked everything. Bear performed his own checks, and then checked Ron's gear, then handed him a 6-pound weight belt, and showed him how to put it on, and how to operate the emergency release. Bear put on 12 pounds, 8 on his waist, and 2 pounds around each thigh. Ron was looking kind of funny at him, and Bear explained he balanced better in the water with some weight lower on his body. Bear and Ron muscled the diving ladder over the stern, and then Bear put up the Diver Down Flag, and plugged in the yellow strobe atop it. It started

flashing, and Bear told him to put his mask on, and the easiest way in was to follow him, and jump into the water. He reminded Ron to hold onto his mask and regulator, then he jumped. Ron followed a second later, then he surfaced and swam back to the boat to retrieve the underwater camera. He dove and spotted Bear right below him maybe 20 feet down. His ears hurt, and he remembered to stop and clear his ears, then he proceeded down. When he reached the bottom at 30 feet, Bear was pointing off to the left. They swam over to the left, and saw an unbelievable sight. It was an intact and undamaged reef. Ron didn't know it, but an intact and undamaged reef this close to shore from the Florida Keys was amazingly rare, since some divers weren't as considerate as others, and either through negligence or thoughtlessness, damaged reefs that were popular and closer to shore. Ron started looking through the viewfinder of his camera, then remembered to turn it on, and to turn on the flash. Suddenly, he saw a big reef fish, and just managed to get it in the viewfinder when it was in range, and pressed the shutter. He spent the next couple of hours exploring the reef and taking pictures. He remembered to look at his gauge, and it was way down, maybe 5-10 minutes of air left. He turned to look in a circle, and Bear was 15 feet away, close enough that if he had an emergency he was handy, but not hovering all over him. Ron held up his pressure gauge, tapped it, and pointed up. Bear nodded and pointed up as well. They slowly ascended, breathing normally all the way. When they broke the surface, they were maybe 50 yards away from the boat. Since he had air available, Ron took a visual bearing on the boat, and dove just under the surface, and swam underwater to the boat, popping up just 10 feet away from the stern. Bear climbed up the diving ladder first, and had Ron hand him his camera and fins. Ron was wearing diving booties under his fins to help prevent blisters, so he climbed up the ladder in his booties. The tank felt extra heavy when he climbed all the way out of the water, and Bear helped by grabbing the top of his tank and lifting so he could climb easier. Bear took off his tank, then helped Ron take his off, then he stowed the empty tanks in the tank locker. Bear took the diver down flag down, and started the motor, then set course back to home. Once they were underway, he asked Ron what he thought of the dive.

Ron said, "That was really awesome, or as you guys say, "Sierra Hotel". I've never seen so many fish in my life, and I know that was just a small part of the Ocean. Too bad I live so far away from the ocean. I guess when I join the Air Force, I'll have to get as many warm water coastal stations as possible, so I can dive all over the world."

Bear was laughing at Ron's "Sierra Hotel" - he guessed Bill finally explained it to him. Then he said, "Too bad you don't have another week here - we could get you your open water PADI cert, but Bill told me you guys were going home in a few days. I just wish my sons had been half as interested in what we do and one-quarter as motivated as you are. They both became shyster personal injury lawyers, and they aren't very good either. I really enjoyed having you around, and if you ever get to MacDill, look me up."

"You can guarantee that Bear. Thanks for everything. You made me feel welcome. Sometimes I felt like I was a circus exhibit, and the only reason I was here was for my uncle Steve to show me off. You SEALS really treated me like you wanted me around. Too bad

Steve's got the skids greased for me to enter the Air Force Academy, or I would have liked to try and become a SEAL."

"Ron you just made my day. If we got 20 kids like you applying for the teams each year, we would be doing very well. I understand your reasons to go to the Academy because of the free education, but remember the Naval Academy at Annapolis can give you the same education."

"I know Bear, but having an uncle who is a Colonel in the Air Force plus a three-star General who just happens to be JSOC makes it much easier to get into the Air Force Academy. Besides, if I told Steve I wanted to be a SEAL, he'd probably kill me."

"I don't know Ron, from what I heard from Bill, the men of your family seem to thrive on extremely dangerous pursuits. Ron was a Sniper, and Steve was a Pararescue Jumper. That's even more dangerous than being a SEAL. They lose more people in training accidents than we lose in operations and training combined. What were you thinking about doing in the Air Force?"

"At first I was just going to be on their shooting team, but then I got the ride in the Strike Eagle, and I think I'd like to be an Eagle driver - I mean the F-16 is nice, but all they do most of the time is fly around and train. At least the F-15 guys get to bomb the crap out of someone, and they still go air to air. Besides, the Guy in Back gives you another set of eyes to spot trouble."

"Ron, I think you've thought this out well. I think you've definitely got the personality to be a great Eagle driver, and from what Steve told Bill, that if you were 16, you'd have your private pilot's license right now, and you did all your landings and take-offs in a small amphibian Cessna. That my not so young friend, takes brass ones."

Ron went below to shower and change, and came back up on deck dressed in BDUs. "I washed and hung up the wetsuit on the hanger you had left me. Thanks for letting me borrow your gear. You want me to watch the boat while you go below and change?"

"Ron, normally I'd say OK, but we are just getting into a narrow restricted channel, and it's busy to boot. I'm going to have to stay at the helm and shower later, but thanks for offering."

Half an hour later, they were at the docks. Ron had unloaded and pocketed the roll of film in the waterproof camera, then closed the back and washed the case off carefully with fresh water. When they docked, Ron offered his hand to Bear. "Thanks for everything Bear, I can guarantee I won't soon forget this, and I promise if I'm near MacDill again, I'll look you up."

Bear decided that a handshake wasn't enough, and gave him a "guy hug" and said, "See you later." Ron turned and left, good thing he did because Bear had tears in his eyes. If the SEALs had a bunch of kids like him coming up through the ranks, and he was able to train them right, the SEALs would be unbeatable. He wished Ron well, and knew he was going to miss him.

## Chapter 68 - Downtime

Bill drove Ron back to Steve's Office, then said goodbye. Ron looked like he was really going to miss the SEALs, but Bill was busy, so he shook Ron's hand and helped him unload his gear. He kept the SEAL swim trunks, BDUs, and aqua shoes. If they still fit him by the time he entered the Air Force Academy, he might have a problem, but for now, he was proud to wear them. Steve was busy, but put down his paperwork to talk to his nephew.

"How was your visit with the SEALs Ron?"

"Great Steve, They taught me how to freefall, swim and Bear even took me scuba diving at a reef in the Keys, and I got some great pictures of reef fish. I got to go on an exercise, and they even let me shoot the Ma Deuce."

"Wow, you had a busy couple of days. How did you like it?"

"Steve, I hate to admit it, but if you hadn't greased the skids for me to go to the Air Force Academy, I might be tempted to go to Annapolis and try to become a SEAL."

"They must have really impressed you."

"Actually, Steve they treated me like a kid brother, instead of a circus sideshow."

"I guess I have been trying to show you off, but you have to admit that if you hadn't pulled off those shooting exhibitions you did, you wouldn't have gotten to do half the stuff you did. After that shooting exhibition you put on the other day, every command on the base was trying their best to woo you into joining their command. If you were old enough, it wouldn't have surprised me if a few of them might have tried to talk you into enlisting."

Actually, I really hit it off with Bear, the SEAL diving instructor, he's got a couple of sons he's kind of disappointed in - they became "Shyster Lawyers" instead of SEALs. I guess he really wanted them to follow in his footsteps. He probably forgot that it takes a special kind of man to do what he does. Even as good as I am at 14, I'd have to work my butt off to have a chance to become a SEAL. I do know one thing, I'm going to keep skydiving and Scuba diving."

"Ron, I'm very proud of you - you do know that, right? You're very mature for your age, and your last comment proved that. You realize that even with your extraordinary God Given talents, you'd still have to work your butt off to become a SEAL. I'm really glad you decided to join the Air Force, but I'd be just as proud if you became a SEAL."

"Steve, I'm pretty sure I want to be an Eagle Driver, and fly the F-15 Strike Eagle."

“How come?”

“Well for one thing, you get to do everything. You can bomb targets, then still go air to air. All the Falcon Drivers get to do is flying around practicing, but the Eagle Drivers have seen action in every war we’ve been involved in. Besides, the Guy In Back gives you an extra set of eyes to spot trouble.”

“Seems like you’ve thought this out. We’ve got the rest of today and tomorrow, then the Doctor said your Dad will be OK to go home. He’ll be OK, it’s just this weather messed up his electrolyte balance. Finding that blockage now means if he takes care of himself, he’ll live a lot longer. So what do you want to do the rest of today?”

“Steve, I’m beat, I’d like to visit with my parents and Jim, then eat an early dinner. As far as tomorrow goes, I’m up for anything, but I can’t go airborne for 24 hours after diving according to Bear.”

“Ron, how come you call Chief Simmons Bear?”

“Because that’s what he told me to call him.”

“Ron, he must have really taken a liking to you, even I can’t call Chief Simmons Bear, because I’m not a SEAL.”

“Cool - guess I never thought about that.”

Steve got up, and picked up Ron’s duffle. He noticed a pair of orange shorts on top, loosened the top of the duffle, and spotted the SEAL logo. They were real SEAL gear, not the stuff you get in the gift shop. Someone at the SEAL command either really took a shine to Ron, or was trying very hard to win him over. Judging by what Ron said about Chief Simmons, he guessed it was a little of both. He pulled the drawstrings on the duffle before Ron caught him looking, and carried it out to the Hummer. They went over to VIP quarters to put his duffle up, then headed to the hospital. Steve decided he had time to visit his sister and brother-in-law, so he went in too. Ron led Steve into his dad’s room, and walked in on Anne giving Roy a very passionate kiss. Ron coughed quietly, and they disengaged. Roy held out his arms, so Ron walked over and gave his dad a big hug.

“How are you doing son? I hope this hadn’t cramped your style?”

Steve spoke up “Are you kidding? Ron spent the last 2 days with the SEALs having the time of his life - go ahead and tell your dad all about it while I talk to your mom.”

Ron filled his dad in while Steve talked to Anne.

“Sis, sorry about walking in on you two. How are things?”

“Roy’s a little grumpy, and doesn’t want to change his ways. I agree with him that he doesn’t need to become a vegetarian, but I am going to subtly alter his eating habits. It will be good for me too. How’s Ron doing really?”

“He had such a good time with the SEALs that if he weren’t going to the Air Force Academy, he told me he wanted to be a SEAL.”

“I think I’d rather have him in the Air Force where it’s safe.”

“Anne, he wants to be a fighter pilot. Now before you say anything, I had nothing to do with it, he decided on his own after flying in the F-15 Strike Eagle. He’s probably safer as a pilot than a SEAL. We lose a bunch each year in training accidents, and they have the second highest accident rate next to PJ’s.”

“Thanks a lot Steve - now I have to worry about losing my son.”

“Anne, you had better get over it quick, because your fears will hold Ron back from being the man he’s supposed to be. You and Roy did an excellent job raising him, and he’ll always be your son, but he’ll soon be a man, and will leave to seek his own way in the world. He’s already started the process while he was here, and by the time he’s old enough to enlist, he’ll be more than ready for the Academy, and life among fighting men. Ron and I were both fighting men, and Ron wants to be one too. In his own way Roy is a fighting man too, but his battles were against Nature. I could never do what he did for a whole year with as little gear as he had. Your average Air Force survival kit has more stuff than he did, plus we have years of training to fall back on. All Roy had was his hunting experience, and what he had read. I’ve always admired Roy.”

“Steve, Roy kind of reminds me of you and Ron, but in a different way. He’s got his soft side too. You’d never believe how he cried when Oliver died. Anyway, I want to hear what Ron was saying, Ok if we go back in - by the way, thanks for the pep talk, and you’re right.”

Anne gave her brother a big hug, and they went in.

“And the neatest part was when Bear took me diving on a coral reef - Dad you should have seen all the fish. I’ve got a couple of rolls of film to get developed, and then I can show you the pictures. Hi Mom, everything OK?”

“Just fine Ron, I was just catching up with my Brother - it might be a while before I see him again.”

Ron continued his story as his mom and Steve listened in. She realized Ron wasn’t a little



kid anymore, but he wasn't fully grown yet. They still had some work to do, and they still had a few things to teach him. Anne loved her son, but knew their time together was limited, and he soon would be on his own. She just hoped Roy would still be there. She fought back a tear looking at Ron and Roy together. She loved them both, but differently.

Roy was impressed, Ron had really grown up in the last couple of weeks. He could tell his son was having the time of his life. He was kind of envious, he had never got a chance to do half the stuff his son did this week. Now he was too old to do most of it. He realized that this was the "cycle of life". He remembered how his father got older and eventually died when he was in his 20's. Roy hoped he would live longer than that, but realized that his life was in God's hands. Ron was becoming a man right before his eyes. He hoped he had done everything he could, and prayed that God would guide him for the rest of the time he had left with his son. He was so proud of Ron he was about to burst. Roy reached out and gave Ron a big hug.

"What's that for Dad?"

"Just because I'm proud of you and I love you."

"I love you too Dad."

All too soon, visiting hours were over, so Steve took Ron and Anne out to dinner. Since Roy was out of the woods, Anne decided that she could live a little, and spend some time with her brother. Jim met them at the restaurant, and between bites, Ron filled him in on his adventures. Jim just shook his head in amazement. After dinner, Anne decided she wanted to be with Roy, so Steve drove her back to the hospital, and dropped Jim and Ron off at the VIP quarters on the way. When they had got out of the Hummer, Steve asked Ron if he wanted to do PT tomorrow with them. "0600 sharp, right Steve?" "0600 Sharp, right here. See you tomorrow." Jim and Ron walked up to their room. They talked for a while, then Ron went to bed, 0600 arrived early in the morning.

Steve dropped Anne off at the Hospital. Before she got out, she turned to Steve "Hey Bro, I forgot to tell you thanks for everything. We've really enjoyed ourselves, and if it weren't for you, Roy's fibrillation event might have been more serious. You realize you probably saved his life with the CPR?"

"Anne, you know CPR too, I just happened to be there. I'm really glad it wasn't more serious than it was. I'm glad Roy's OK. If I get a chance, I'd like to talk to the two of you alone before you go."

Anne gave her brother a big hug and got out of the Hummer. Steve waited until she was inside the hospital, and drove back to his office to finish the paperwork.

The next morning, Ron and Steve led the group PT, then Ron ran upstairs for a quick shower and a change of clothes, then met Steve for Breakfast. “Ron, how would you like to do some more shooting today, just you and me - no more sideshows, OK?”

“Thanks Steve, I realized you were just showing me off, but I really resented it sometimes.”

“Sorry Ron, I overdid it a little. How about inviting Jim if he isn’t doing anything?”

Ron walked over to the house phone and called their room. Jim answered, and Ron asked him if he wanted to go shooting. Jim said he would be down in 15 minutes, he needed to get dressed.

15 minutes Jim walked in looking like he just got up. Steve asked him if everything was alright. “Everything’s OK Steve, just enjoying the downtime. In Alaska, I’m busier than a one armed paper hanger. I rarely get to sleep in any more, and TV is a major luxury. Let me get some coffee, OJ, and some toast, and I’ll be good to go.”

Jim returned with a little more than what he had planned. He said the food looked too good to pass up, so he grabbed a plate. Ron and Steve waited for Jim to finish up, then they walked out to the Hummer. Steve got on his cell phone, and called the Armory to get Ron’s weapon out, and have the range master set up the rifle range. When they got there, Jim asked if he could shoot an M -16. The armorer handed him a match AR-15 instead. Jim shrugged his shoulders, and carried it to the range. The range master had set up 4 shooting lanes. Ron wanted to shoot at 400 yards, which was far enough to be challenging, but close enough so he could relax and enjoy shooting. Jim started on the 100 yard line, and Steve on the 300-yard line. The Range master joined them on the 300 yard line. When everyone was set, Ron went prone, and as soon as the Range master gave him the OK to shoot, he started shooting at the 400 yard target. After 10 rounds, Steve looked up, and all 10 rounds were in the x-ring. Steve shook his head and concentrated on his own target. Later that afternoon, Steve had a surprise for him. The shooting instructors from the other commands wanted to make a presentation to Ron. They all showed up at the range right as Ron finished shooting his 10<sup>th</sup> perfect 10-shot string at 400 yards. Ron saw the instructor’s vehicles pulling up, and left his rifle with the action open to cool off, and stood up. Everyone else stopped firing, and stood up in curiosity. Steve was the only one who knew what was going on, and gathered the instructors in front of Ron.

The Delta Instructor started things off. “Ron Williams, we wanted to give you some things to remember your trip by. We also wanted to thank you, and recognize your shooting achievements. That said, Attention to Orders.”

Everyone in the group stood at attention including Ron. The Delta Instructor marched forward solemnly and pinned a marksmanship award on Ron’s chest. Ron couldn’t see it, but Steve was impressed. It was a Delta Sharpshooter medal. It was the top shooting qualification in Delta. Each command pinned an award next to that one, and the final award

was delivered by the JSOC. Ron remembered the first time he had met General Shepard. This time he had a huge Pelican case with him. He set the Pelican case on the bench, and his aide handed him a plaque. The general presented the plaque to Ron, and he read it out loud.

“In recognition of Ron Williams shooting ability this date, specifically shooting a 2.092 inch group at 600 yards, the Special Operations Command, in conjunction with Barretts firearms and Swarovski Optiks, hereby award this Barrett’s light 50 prototype and the Scope, along with 1000 rounds of 50 cal match ammo to Ron Williams.”

When the JSOC finished his presentation, every instructor was ready to burst out in applause, but stayed at strict attention until dismissed. Finally General Shepard shook Ron’s hand, and said “Well Done, Son.”

“Thank you Sir, does this mean this rifle is mine?”

“I know you’re not 18, but my JAG assures me that by the time he’s finished with the legal paperwork, it will all be legal. By the way, Barrett and Swarovski placed a condition on giving you the gun. They want you to act as a consultant on future prototypes. They’d fly you at their expense to MacDill for you to T&E their new prototypes every couple of years, and write a report. They even agreed to pay you \$10,000 per report plus expenses.”

“I don’t know what to say General, except Thank you very much, and please tell Barrett I’d be honored.”

“One other thing Ron, here’s a copy of the letter I sent your Senator, I’m requesting you be admitted to the Air Force Academy as soon as you are old enough.”

Ron smiled and thanked the General, then he was mobbed by the instructors, who were congratulating him, shaking his hand, and pounding him on the back. When everyone was through, Ron thanked the instructors, the General, and his uncle Steve for the great time he had. He said he looked forward to returning to MacDill upon graduation from the Air Force Academy, and he hoped to get assigned to a Strike Squadron as an F-15 Eagle pilot. The instructors were chorusing “Sierra Hotel” despite the presence of the General.

When everything broke up, Ron was eyeing the Barretts when he noticed something different from the last time he shot it. Someone had painted a single white feather on the stock. Ron was floored, since he knew Carlos Hathcock’s signature was a single white feather. Steve helped load the pelican case, and the case of 50 cal ammo in the Hummer, then congratulated Ron “Ron, as soon as you’re old enough, I can guarantee you’ll have an appointment to the Air Force Academy, General Shepard has about 10 times the pull I do, and every cadet he’s recommended for the Academy was accepted.”

“Thanks, Steve, I don’t know what to say, I’ve had enough adventures and experiences to

last a lifetime in the last weeks. But my guess is it's just starting." Steve gave his nephew a big bear hug, and suggested they go and get cleaned up, go see his parents, then go eat dinner. They had an early flight tomorrow. A couple of hours later, a courier showed up looking for Steve. When Steve showed his ID, the courier left a package with him, addressed to Ron Williams. Ron opened it, and it was the title paperwork for the firearm, and a consultancy contract for Barrett Firearms, and a check for \$10,000. Steve was confused until he read the part about Ron's evaluation being included in the T&E report filed by the testing team, and the check was in payment for the report. Steve was floored. Barrett just gave Ron a rifle worth \$10,000 easy, and a Swarovski scope worth much more than that, and now Barrett gave him a check for \$10,000.00 on top of it. Ron saw the check, and realized it would go a long ways to purchasing his own plane. Too bad he was too young to get his license. They put the paperwork back in the packet, and finished dinner. When Ron went to the VIP quarters, he was walking on air. When he told Jim the good news, he was blown away. Ron was wondering why Jim always looked tired, then he realized he was getting old. He was at least 5 years older than his dad. After talking a while, they went to bed.

## Chapter 69 - Homeward Bound

Ron got up early for 0600 PT, and was stunned when there were 3 times as many soldiers in front of the VIP quarters than yesterday. He recognized some of the instructors, but he didn't recognize most of the soldiers. Steve greeted Ron, and told Ron to stand next to him for the entire PT; this was the Joint Command's send-off for Ron. When Ron was next to him at parade rest with the rest of the Company, Steve took command of the Company. "Company, Jumping Jacks, on my count" and they began. When they finished the stationary part of the morning PT, Steve turned to Ron and asked him to lead the morning run. Ron said "With Pleasure Sir" and marched toward the head of the column. When he got to the front, he turned and yelled "Company, Quick March" and started marching toward the running area, when he reached the track, he sped up to a "Ranger Run" and held it for the requisite 5 miles. Steve was off to his right half a pace behind. Steve was positively beaming with pride. At the end of 5 miles, Ron called "Company Quick march" and as soon as they were marching, one of the Ranger instructors started a cadence, and soon the entire company was doing the familiar cadence. By the second refrain, Ron knew the cadence, and joined in with the rest of the company. He felt like he belonged, but not totally. He vowed he would come back to MacDill when he could be counted a full-fledged member of this company of warriors.

At VIP quarters, Ron called "Company Halt" and they came to a stop. From the back of the group came a yell, which was echoed by the entire company "Hooo-rah." It was loud enough to rattle windows on the bottom floor of the VIP quarters. Steve walked over to Ron, gave him a big hug and said "See you later Nephew." then turned to the company and said "Company Dismissed" but every one of the instructors present stopped by to shake Ron's hand, and wish him luck. When they were finished, Steve told Ron he had 15 minutes to shower and get changed before breakfast, their flight was in an hour and a half. Ron hugged his uncle, waved to the instructors, and dashed up to the elevators since he was too tired to run up 5 flights of stairs. When he arrived on their floor, he took his passkey out of his BDU pocket and opened the door to his suite. Roy and Anne were in the main room getting organized and packed. Ron said that Steve was going to meet them downstairs in 15 minutes if they wanted breakfast before the flight. From Steve's demeanor, Ron thought the food at the restaurant would be far better than that offered on the flight. Ron hurried into his room, got in the shower, then got dressed, and was back down in the lobby with several minutes to spare. The elevators opened, and Roy, Anne, and Jim stepped out to join them. They walked to the restaurant, and walked through the breakfast buffet line, and Anne watched Roy like a hawk to make sure he didn't sneak any bacon. They sat down to a quick but boisterous breakfast, then they went back upstairs. When Ron opened the door, Lucky practically knocked him down in his eagerness to greet him.

"Sorry Lucky, I guess I kind of forgot about you."

Ron played with his dog while the adults got everything organized. A bellman appeared with a luggage cart to take their luggage, and Steve met them at the door with his Hummer. Their gun cases had already been loaded out of the Armory while they finished packing, and Steve drove them to the VIP waiting area. When they got out and Steve was unloading the back, Roy commented about the extra Pelican case and a huge wooden ammo case.

“Dad, that’s the rifle they gave me. It’s a prototype Barrett’s Light 50 and a case of 50 BMG Match ammo.”

Roy didn’t know what to think, so didn’t say anything. All their bags were tagged and taken to the aircraft, which was in the final stages of pre-flight. By the time they were all in the VIP waiting area, they were told they could board the aircraft. They boarded the luxurious VC-120 and the air stairs folded up, and as soon as they were seated, the plane taxied and took off. Ron must have been jaded by the high-performance take-off of the F-15 Eagle, because he thought the take-off was pretty sedate. As soon as the seat belt signs were turned off, Ron made up for lost time with Lucky, who really appreciated the attention. The only time Ron stopped playing with Lucky was when the steward came back with the drink cart, and Ron got a soda. Later that afternoon, they were on final for Elmendorf AFB in Anchorage, AK. 15 minutes later they were on the ground within walking distance of their DeHaviland Otter.

After doing a thorough walk around, Jim climbed into the pilot’s seat, Ron sat in the co-pilot’s seat even though the DeHaviland was a single-control aircraft, and Anne, Roy, and Lucky took up what space in the back was available after all their luggage was stored. Jim contacted the tower, and was instructed to wait 2 minutes, and then received permission to taxi to the active runway. The Tower Controller must have been new, because he gave Jim the totally unnecessary warning to beware of jet wash. Jim didn’t respond to the tower, and just let it slide. When he reached the correct runway, he called the tower and advised them that he was at the runway. The tower came back “cleared for immediate departure- buster, traffic pattern is very crowded. Stay below 500AGL until 5 miles away from runway, then slowly ascend to 2,000 feet.” Jim was firewalling the throttle as he acknowledged the call, and they rolled quickly down the runway. Since they had twice as much runway as he needed, Jim stayed in ground effect after he took off to gain speed and depart the busy airfield as fast as possible. Once he cleared the airfield’s fence line by 5 miles, he started a slow climb to 2,000 feet, and maintained that altitude until he contacted Allakaket. They needed to refuel in Allakaket to safely make it to Roy’s place and back. When they landed in Allakaket, everyone bailed out and stretched their legs, and Lucky took advantage of the numerous plants to relieve himself. When the plane was refueled and serviced, Jim did a walk around to verify everything was correct, with Ron walking with him. Finally Jim whistled and yelled “All Aboard”. They piled back on board, and Jim taxied and took off without incident. 2 hours later they were home again. When they had unloaded the plane, Jim told them he had to get back to Allakaket and get some sleep. He taxied out to the lake and took off.

Lucky stopped at every tree in the clearing, he had either to go real bad, or felt he needed to reestablish his territory. Roy and Anne were dog-tired by the time they carried everything into the cabin. They had a real problem trying to carry the wooden case full of 50 BMG ammo, but they got it inside and stored on the shelf. Roy was curious what kind of weapon would take ammo that heavy; the case weighed almost twice what the case of the .308 match ammo did. Ron set the pelican case containing the Barrett's rifle on the table, and opened it for his dad to see for the first time. Roy's eyes nearly bugged out when he got a good look at the rifle and the huge scope, then he noticed the single white feather painted on the side of the synthetic stock. Roy was familiar with the exploits of Carlos Hathcock, and the name the Vietnamese called him "White Feather". When Ron showed him a BMG 50 Match round, he understood why the gun was so huge; the round was easily 2-3 times as big as the 308.

"Ron, how far did you say you were shooting this gun?"

"Dad, the farthest target at their range was at 1,000 yards; my best group was a 5-shot 9-inch group."

Roy almost had another heart attack. He thought 300 yards was a long way, and that was using a scope. His son shot a sub-moa group at over 3 times that distance, and in front of an audience. Roy just shook his head, and marveled at his son. He wondered what he would be like at 18. They packed the gun back in its case, and stored it with the rest of their weapons. Anne decided to make Spaghetti-O's for dinner, since it was quick, and fairly low fat. She got a fire going in the woodstove, and put a pan on to heat, then opened 3 cans. Ron was playing with Lucky while dinner was cooking, and Roy set the table. When Anne said dinner was ready, Ron fed Lucky then washed his hands. They all sat down at the table and Roy said grace. He had a lot to be thankful for, and finally said "Amen" before the food got too cold. After dinner, Roy and Anne read their Bibles and Ron played with Lucky some more - it seemed like Lucky was making up for lost time. Finally Ron tired Lucky out, and he went and laid down next to Ron's bed. Ron picked up his Bible, and read a few chapters before telling his parents he was going to bed.

The next morning, Ron and Roy did their chores after breakfast. There was a lot to do, they needed to chop and haul wood. Ron was surprised that his Dad handed him the safety gear, then sat down on the porch to talk to him.

"Ron, your mother and I had a long talk last night. I know you're only 14, but you are going to have to take over several things I used to do, since the docs say I can't do them, at least for a while. You're going to have a lot more responsibility than I did at your age, but we don't have any alternative. If we want to live out here, wood needs to be cut, and we need to hunt. You could cut wood with an axe, but the chainsaw is faster, and not much more dangerous if you treat it with respect. You've been doing things for the last year that are way more dangerous than running a chainsaw, so we agreed it's time you took over felling

the trees we need for firewood. I'll still supervise and assist where I can, but the bulk of the work is going to rest squarely on your shoulders. I know you're up to it, question is, will you?"

"Dad, I don't know what to say, I don't want to seem like I'm usurping your position, but I can see the wisdom in letting me do the more physically strenuous stuff, at least for now. I'm going to need your help and advice. If it's OK with you, I'll gladly help wherever I can."

Roy gave Ron a big hug "I knew I could count on you son, let me show you how to put on the safety gear."

When they got the safety gear on, Ron picked up the chainsaw and carried it over to the gasoline and oil. Roy showed him how to check the oil level and fill the gasoline. He told Ron never to fill the gasoline when the engine was hot, it might catch fire. When the chainsaw was full, he carried it to the grove of trees Roy wanted to chop down, then they walked back and dragged the dollies over to the spot. Roy gave Ron a safety lecture about how to safely fell trees, and how to safely operate the chainsaw, then they cleared all the brush from around the trees. Looking up, Ron asked Roy which way he thought the tree would fall. Ron agreed with his dad, and planned the wedge and back cuts accordingly. After saying a brief prayer, Ron primed the carburetor and pulled the starter rope. On the 3<sup>rd</sup> pull, the engine caught and soon was idling steadily. Roy cleared back to a safe distance, and Ron lowered the face shield of his helmet, then picked up the chainsaw, and made the first wedge cut, pulled the blade out, and made the second cut, removing the wedge, then he released the chain brake and walked quickly around to the other side of the tree, and made the felling cut then stepped back quickly as the tree fell right where Roy said it would. He set the chainsaw down, and Roy walked over to Ron "Well done Son, now let's get the branches off the trunk." Roy talked Ron through the procedure, then stood back a safe distance as Ron de-limbed the tree.

When they finished de-limbing the tree, Roy helped Ron sort the branches into usable wood they'd come back later and cut up, and stuff they'd leave to decompose and renew the forest. Roy and Ron set the tree on the dollies, and Ron hauled it over to the sawhorses next to the cabin, then went back to the grove and did it all over again. When the day was finished, Ron had done 10 trees. Not a record, but pretty good for a 14-year old. Ron was exhausted when they were finished, and Roy helped him carry the gear back to the Cabin. Ron still had to carry the chainsaw, since it was too heavy for Roy to carry, but Roy did carry all the safety gear. When they got home, Anne had dinner ready, and asked them how things went. Roy felt like a proud papa, and told Anne that Ron had felled 10 trees, basically all by himself. Anne walked over to Ron and gave her son a big hug. "Son, I'm so proud of you, thanks for helping your father. They sat down to eat, and Roy noticed there was not much meat in his stew., and Ron seemed to get the lion's share. Roy was glad that Anne was letting him eat red meat at all, but noticed she was loading him up with veggies. After he said grace, they



ate quietly. Lucky ate his dog food, and then wanted to play, but Ron was too tired for any energetic play, and basically sat down on the bearskin rug and petted Lucky.

The next morning, they were surprised when they heard Jim's plane coming in for a landing. Roy was surprised since Jim normally called first. Jim taxied out to their cabin and shut down. Roy noticed Jim was looking kind of grey, and decided not to say anything. Jim said he had come over for a visit, he had something to discuss with them. When he got inside, they all sat down at the table, and Jim dropped a bombshell.

"Roy, the other day after I dropped you off, I went to see the doctor in Allakaket, and he confirmed my suspicions, he said there was no way I could pass my medical exam to keep my Commercial ticket in 6 months. That leaves the town in a major bind, since I'm the only Bush Pilot in the area with a Commercial Ticket and the DeHaviland Otter that is big enough to carry a bunch of cargo. I need to ask you a big favor. Ron's ready to get his Private Pilot's license, and he would have one if he were 16. I'm pretty sure the FAA would grant an emergency waiver of the 16-yr old requirement for Commercial tickets under the circumstances. They'll probably restrict his ticket for the first 90 days by requiring me to fly as his co-pilot, then I'm pretty sure the FAA will pull my Commercial ticket. Hopefully they'll let me keep my Private and IP tickets. I talked to my friend who loaned me the Cessna, and he said he would be willing to make the loan permanent, since he won't fly it anyway. I was planning on giving Ron the DeHaviland when he turned 16, and this just pushed my plans forward. Anyway, I need your permission for Ron to get his Commercial ticket, and we'll need to build a hangar on your land to store the plane."

Roy spoke first "Jim, this is kind of sudden - do you think we could talk about this first?"

"Roy, I'd love to, but the truth is Ron is going to have to start flying the DeHaviland as soon as possible, since he'll have to fly by himself within 6 months. There is No Way the FAA will allow me to fly as the pilot after I have to take my medical exam. According to my doctor, my arteries are clogged badly enough that I could stroke out any time. If that happened while I'm flying a plane, I could kill someone besides me, and I can't have that on my conscience."

Anne spoke to Roy, she knew what Jim was saying better than anyone else. "Roy, until Jim gets his arteriosclerosis under control, he's a walking time bomb. Even with meds, he could still stroke out if one of the blood vessels feeding his brain gets a clot in it. Even with the meds, it will be difficult for him to fly sometimes. This would definitely qualify as an emergency. I'm not too happy, but this is just like our conversation we had yesterday about the chain saw. It has to get done, and Ron's the only one qualified to do it. There are more people than us relying on the bush planes, all the other homesteaders, plus the hunting lodges rely on bush planes to deliver passengers and freight, or the lodges would go out of business."

“Anne, I hate it when you’re right. OK, Ron - looks like you’re getting your license ahead of schedule.”

“Dad, remember the \$10 thousand dollars Barrett gave me - we could use that toward building a winterized hangar here next to the cabin. If I cleared out the trees around it, we could erect an insulated steel building that would be big enough to hold the plane easily. I’ve already got a guaranteed appointment to the Air Force Academy, and they pay all my expenses, so I don’t need to save money for that, besides, I’ll earn enough flying commercial to cover all my expenses, plus extra to build my savings. Grandpa Jim, I’ll do whatever I have to help out.”

Roy spoke up “Well looks like that’s settled. OK, Jim - I take it you’ll be living in Allakaket until further notice. Until we get the hangar built, can you still keep the DeHaviland in Allakaket, and Ron can fly the Cessna back and forth from here for now.”

“Roy that’s an excellent idea - the Cessna is much easier to land on your lake, and it would make a perfect commuter plane - which is why I wanted it after I gave the DeHaviland to Ron. That way building the hangar isn’t a massive emergency, and we can hire someone to help build it, since neither you nor I are in any shape to build it, and Ron can’t do it by himself. OK, I’ll have the Mayor and my doctor write a letter to the FAA, and see what they say, meanwhile, I’ll have Ron fly back with me in the DeHaviland and come back here with the Cessna - he’s more than ready to solo. You ok with this Ron?”

“Sure Gramps - I was wondering when you were going to let me solo.”

Anne and Roy gave Ron a hug, then Roy handed Ron his shoulder holster and fanny pack. “Ron promise me you’ll wear this from now on when you fly, just in case.”

“Sure Dad, I was planning on it anyway - I remember what happened to you, and I could get forced down by a mechanical problem as well. Good thing to plan ahead just in case. Ok Jim, ready to go.”

When they got to the plane, Jim told Ron to get in the pilot’s seat - he wasn’t feeling too good. Ron walked around the plane, and checked everything out, and then opened the pilot’s door and got in. Jim handed him the ignition keys “She’s yours now - take good care of her.” Jim was starting to tear up, so he turned his head to look out the window. When he had wiped the tear away, he watched Ron do the preflight checks, then start the motor. Once the big radial was warmed up, Ron used the throttle and brakes to turn the plane around, and taxi toward the lake. Once he was waterborne, he increased his taxi speed as he taxied to the downwind end of the lake. Once he turned upwind, he set the flaps to 20%, and checked with Jim, making sure he was good to go. Jim gave him a thumbs up, and Ron shoved the throttle to full, and when he hit 80 knots, he gave the yoke a tug backward, and the lightly loaded plane practically leapt into the air. He maintained maximum climb rate until he

cleared the far ridge, then cleaned up the flaps, and set the plane for a cruise climb to 2,000 feet, and turned for Allakaket. When he got close enough to see the lake, he radioed Allakaket, and received permission to land. He made a perfect landing on the lake, and taxied toward the runway and stopped by the pumps. They filled the tanks on the DeHaviland, then taxied toward Jim's hangar, and put the plane in the hangar. Right next to the DeHaviland's hangar was the Cessna Floatplane. Ron shut down the engine, and went with Jim into town.

"Ron, you flew that absolutely perfectly - you're ready to get your license. Let's go over to the Mayor's office and I need to send some paperwork to the FAA office in Anchorage."

They drove over to the Mayor's office to borrow his fax machine. Bill had his letter requesting the emergency waiver ready when they arrived, and Jim had a copy of his Doctor's letter. He faxed the letters to the FAA office in Anchorage, then told Ron "Now we wait - hopefully they won't take too long to make up their minds. I need to go lay down - these meds take a lot out of you." Bill drove Jim to a house he had rented while he was in town the other day, and then drove Ron back to the airport to fly the Cessna home.

Bill shook Ron's hand and told him "Ron, there are a lot of people counting on you, but I know you can handle it - I'll let you know as soon as we hear anything from the FAA. If there are any emergencies, you'll need to either fly the Cessna to the emergency if you can handle it in the Cessna, or come back here and pick up the DeHaviland. I wish I owned a DeHaviland - that is one sweet plane. I know you're not licensed yet, but the FAA will make an exception for emergencies. See you later, and good luck."

Ron did a very thorough walk-around then climbed into the pilot's seat "Well here goes nothing" he thought "What a way to wind up soloing." and he turned the key in the ignition. Once the motor was warmed up, he made sure the fuel tank read full and all the gauges were working, and turned to taxi to the lake. He tweaked the throttle to get the plane rolling, then taxied at just above idle to the lake. Once he was waterborne, he taxied faster to the downwind end of the lake while he set the plane up for take-off. When he reached the end of the lake, he called the tower and received permission to take off, and pushed the throttle to full. When he reached 60 knots, the plane wanted to fly, so he pulled back gently on the yoke, and he was airborne. He kept the plane at max climb until he cleared the opposite range, then climbed more sedately to 2,000 feet and turned for home. He paid careful attention to his compass, and checked his flight time. When he flew over the lake, he saw the wind was still blowing the same direction as he left, so he turned to land with the wind, and set the plane up for landing. As he reduced throttle, the plane slowly sank toward the lake, and as he cleared the ridge, he chopped the throttle to idle, and he floated right on in like a goose landing on a lake. He landed with barely a splash, and coasted to a stop with over 100 feet to spare. He taxied over to the edge of the lake nearest the cabin, and coasted until he felt the wheels make contact with the dirt and let the plane roll up until he was totally on dry land, then he slowly taxied next to the cabin. Roy and Anne were smiling and

waving as he pulled up next to the cabin. He pushed the throttle all the way to cutoff, and switched the engine off, then climbed out. His Mom was the first to give him a big hug, then his Dad joined in the “group Hug”, finally they let him go, only for Lucky to try to flatten him. He didn’t succeed, but did manage to lick every square inch of Ron’s face. Finally, Ron got Lucky off him, and they went inside to eat dinner.

## Chapter 70 - The new Bush Pilot

The next morning, Bill called Roy on the radio, and asked Ron to fly to Allakaket, The FAA had approved the emergency waiver, and wanted Ron in Anchorage today to take his Commercial Pilot's test. Roy gave Ron the good news, and \$100 in cash in case he wanted to buy anything in Anchorage while he was there. Ron went out and preflighted the Cessna, then started the motor and taxied to the lake. After he checked that everything was set for takeoff, he gunned the engine and was soon airborne. 1 hour later he was in Allakaket. He called ahead for clearance to land, and made a perfect landing. He taxied up next to Jim's hangar and parked the Cessna. Jim was waiting for him in Bill's office. Ron handed Bill the Barrett check for 10 thousand dollars and asked Bill to open an account for him. Bill thought it was irregular for a 14-year old to have a checking account, but figured after the last couple of days, he was going to have to alter his views of irregular. Bill deposited the check, opened an account for Ron, and gave him some counter checks and a checkbook. Bill explained that hardly anyone would take counter checks, so he would order a box of regular checks, and he would set up his account just like his parents, so Ron could call Bill with an order, and Bill would charge 10% over cost plus shipping - wait a minute Ron was the pilot now - guess he needed to modify that to a straight 10%, and he needed to set up an account for fuel in Ron's name. With the paperwork done, Bill drove them out to the airport, and Ron did a walk around of the DeHaviland to make sure it was good to fly, then taxied out to the lake since they had already filled the tank when they landed yesterday.

When they reached the end of the lake, Ron called for permission to take-off, and when the tower gave him the clearance, he pushed the throttle to max, and they were flying. He maintained max climb until he cleared the ridge, then turned and headed for Anchorage as he climbed to 2,000 feet. When he was close enough to Anchorage, he called the FAA tower and asked for landing instructions. They told him to land at the municipal airport, and they would be met by a FAA vehicle that would escort them to the FAA office. Jim told Ron that a wheels landing was different than a float landing, and he needed to descend slower since the runway was less forgiving than water, and he needed to land flatter with not as much flair like a water landing. Jim held his hand up to demonstrate the angle of attack he needed for a successful wheels landing. Ron called "On Final" at 1 mile from the runway threshold, and reduced his speed and held a 20 degree angle of attack until just before touchdown, when he reduced it to 10 degrees. The wheels kissed the runway perfectly without any bounce, and Ron allowed the nose to drop gently and the nose wheel made contact with the runway. Since the runway was way so long, Jim told him not to use brakes until he had to, so he had a long rollout until he spotted the FAA truck ahead, and applied the brakes. He came to a complete stop 50 feet behind the truck, and when the truck lit its "follow me" lights and moved out, Ron added enough throttle to maintain a 50 foot following distance. They taxied for over a mile, then the truck stopped in front of the FAA office, and they were directed by ground crew to park the plane, and Ron pulled it in perfectly, then cut the throttle and shut off the plane. When the propeller came to a complete stop, they opened the cabin

doors and walked into the FAA office.

Jim walked in ahead of Ron, and the guy behind the counter stood up and walked around the counter to shake his hand “Jim, how are you - I heard, what a way to end a 30-year flying career, this must be your protégée I’ve heard so much about.”

“Dan, I’d like you to meet my grandson, Ron Williams.”

“Grandson, I didn’t know you had any kids?”

“Ron Fellows kid sister is his mom. Anne said that since I was always “Uncle Jim” to her, she wanted me to be Ron’s surrogate grandfather.”

“Did you say Ron Fellows - you know he’s the spitting image of his namesake?”

“Yeah, I noticed, also Ron is a sharpshooter. We just came back from MacDill AFB visiting his Uncle Steve Fellows.”

“You mean Colonel Fellows?”

“Yeah, that one - anyway, Steve took Ron out to their range, and he shot a 4-inch group at 600 yards, then a 9-inch group at 1000 yards with their new Barretts prototype. The Delta instructors, I’m told have put his autographed target up in their club on base.”

“Ron, I was watching you come in - you were flying the plane?”

“Yes Sir.”

“That was a textbook landing if I ever saw one, and that also means you flew all the way here from Allakaket.”

“Dan, Ron’s been flying that little Cessna solo for the last day or so, ever since I found out I shouldn’t fly. He’s done at least a half-dozen waterborne takeoffs and landings, including several at HelpmeJack lake.”

“That little postage stamp - Wow. Tell you what, I was going to give you a check ride, but I can see that’s a waste of time. Here’s the Written exam, you have 1 hour, then if you pass it, and a physical, I’ll issue a Restricted Commercial license. The restriction is that for the next 90 days, you fly with Jim as your co-pilot whenever you fly passengers or freight, except in an emergency. Jim, after the 90 days, you’ll have to surrender your commercial ticket, but you can keep your Private License and your Instructor’s permit. You OK with that?”

“Sure, the whole reason for the emergency waiver of the age limit is I can’t fly anymore, at

least with passengers.”

Ron sat down at a desk, and handed the test back 45 minutes later. Dan scored the test and shook his head. Ron had gotten a score of 99%, and he was pretty sure the one he missed was a miss-marked answer.

“Ron, you just missed a perfect score, and I’m pretty sure the one you missed was a miss-marked answer. OK, let’s go in the back and have the nurse do a quick flight physical, then I’ll issue your ticket.”

Ron went into the back room, where the nurse asked him to take off his shirt. She listened to his heart, checked his Blood Pressure and pulse. She had to check them twice, because both his BP and pulse were very low, but not dangerously so. She had him put his shirt back on, and read a wall chart. Not only did he read the 20/20 line perfectly, but the one below it as well. She shook her head, and signed off on his medical evaluation - must be nice to be a kid. When Dan saw his BP, pulse and vision scores, he said “Well that explains a few things. Jim - I think I figured something out. Ron’s BP and pulse rate were almost in the cadaver range, and his vision was better than 20/20. Didn’t you say that Ron Fellows had a super low BP and pulse rate?”

“Yeah Dan, it was scary - he could run 5 miles and his pulse would still be lower than my resting pulse, and now that you mention it, Ron was able to see stuff much farther than I could even when I was younger.”

“Well looks like his nephew inherited those traits as well. Anyway, here’s his Commercial Pilot’s License, with the 90-day restriction. I’ll mail a new unrestricted license in 90-days. Congratulations Ron.”

Dan shook Ron’s hand, then Jim’s, and they walked out of the office. Ron looked at his watch. They could go shopping, but then they’d have to stay overnight, and if he left right now, he could still make it home before dark. “Jim, what should we do - we don’t have enough time to shop in Anchorage and still make it home tonight, and if we leave right now, I can just make it home before dark.”

Jim looked at his watch, then told Ron, “We better stay in Anchorage overnight, it’s cutting it a little too close for safety. What if you run into a headwind, you could be landing in pitch dark. Not a good way to start your first day as a commercial pilot.”

They walked back into the FAA office, and Dan said they could use his phone, and he was about to head home anyway, so he could give them a lift into town if they wanted to spend the night. Jim thanked Dan, and called Bill in Allakaket and asked him to relay a message. As soon as they hung up, Bill called Roy to tell him Ron got his license, and they would be staying in Anchorage overnight, and flying back first thing tomorrow.

Dan locked up the office, and drove them into town. Jim had Dan drop them off in front of a certain store, and had Ron wait outside. When he came out, Jim handed Ron a gift box, and told him to open it. Inside was a sunglass case, and a pair of original Ray Ban Aviator's sunglasses. Ron tried them on, and they fit perfectly. Ron gave Jim a hug and thanked him. Jim told Ron he was hungry and they needed to find a hotel to check into then go get dinner. Ron was strolling around town fully armed, but no one commented, since people routinely went armed in Alaska. When they checked into the hotel, Jim suggested he put the guns in the hotel safe, since he was under age. Ron agreed, and the clerk took the shoulder holster and put it in the hotel safe, and gave Ron a claim check for it with the serial numbers of the guns on it. She recommended a good restaurant right down the street, so they went to eat dinner. After dinner, they went right to bed, since Jim wanted to head back at first light.

Then next morning, they got up, checked out, and were told they had coffee and donuts right around the corner that were free for all guests. Jim found a bran muffin he could safely eat, and Ron ate a huge cinnamon roll and they had some orange juice there as well. Jim asked the desk clerk to call them a cab, and 5 minutes later, a cab pulled up, and took them to the airport, and dropped them off in front of the FAA office. Dan met them before they left, and told Jim he checked the weather, and it was clear all the way to Canada, so they should have good flying weather. When Dan left to go in the office, Ron put on his shoulder holster and fanny pack, then put on his Ray Bans. They both did the walk around, and everything was perfect. Jim suggested they taxi over to the fuel depot and fill up the tanks just to be safe. They got aboard and Ron taxied over to the fuel pumps, and filled both tanks, then paid the attendant. Jim was wondering where he got the money, but didn't say anything. They taxied clear of the pumps, and Ron re-checked everything, then called the tower and asked for take-off clearance. Since it was still early, they were given immediate clearance, so he advanced the throttles and taxied the short distance to the active runway, then called "Rolling" and pulled the throttle to full. At 80 knots, the plane was flying, so Ron pulled back gently on the yoke, and climbed high enough to avoid the fence and surrounding obstacles. He called when he was clear of the airport, and the controller said he was clear to ascend to 2,000 feet, so he put the plane into a cruise climb, and was soon at 2,000 feet. He double checked his compass, and made a small correction so he was flying direct path to Allakaket.

2 hours later, he called Allakaket control, and received landing clearance. He made a perfect landing, and taxied to the runway, and then pulled the DeHaviland up to the pumps, filled the tanks, then taxied to the hangar. Jim gave Ron a big hug when he got out, and said "You done good Ron." Bill met them to give Jim a ride home, and Ron walked over to the Cessna, and preflighted it, then taxied to the fuel pumps and filled it up, then taxied to the lake. When he got to the downwind end of the lake, he set the plane up for takeoff and called the tower for permission. When they said OK, he advanced the throttle to full, and soon he was flying. As soon as he cleared the far ridge, he turned for home, and climbed to 2,000 feet. 2 hours later, he spotted their lake, and turned to land. As he cleared the ridge, he chopped the throttle, and floated right down to the lake, and landed without a splash. When he taxied up to the cabin, his Mom and Dad were waiting for him, as well as Lucky.



It was hard to tell who was more eager to greet him, but Lucky won the “Let’s knock him over with our greeting” contest paws down. After getting his face washed, he got Lucky off him. Anne had a surprise for him, and a celebration of sorts. She had baked a cake, and they presented Ron with her brother Ron’s Pilot Chronograph. It was an Original Tag Heuer Specialist Pilot Chronograph that Anne had kept since Roy gave it to her. She sent it to the jeweler, and except for some minor cleaning, it was as good as new. She had it inscribed, and delivered when Ron had decided to study for his pilot’s license. She told him to turn it over and read the back of the watch. It said “Fly Straight, Fly High and Fly Long. Love, Mom & Dad” Ron asked them where they got it, and Anne explained that it used to be her Brother Ron’s and Roy had brought it to her when he first arrived in Allakaket after spending the winter in the cabin. Ron gave them both a big hug, then turned to cry.

## Chapter 71 - New Kid in Town

The next day, Anne surprised Ron with a big huge stack of books. “Mom, what’s this?”

“Ron, now you’ll be flying others around, you are responsible for them. I know you know basic first aid, but I want you to get some advanced knowledge. Your father had to go through all this when I was pregnant with you, since we decided to have you at home, and I was the only one with first aid knowledge. By the time you’re finished, you’ll have knowledge equivalent to an EMT. It might come in handy some day - like what if neither Steve nor I were there the day Roy collapsed, and the nearest help was over an hour away. That is what you might face someday - not necessarily your dad, but what if a hunter had a heart attack while you were flying, what would you do? Just something to think about. In what’s left of your spare time, I expect you to be studying these medical books. I’ve put them in order, and left Roy’s notes for you to work from so you can study faster.”

“Gee Thanks Mom.”

“OK, Ron - back to work - Roy said you needed to finish cutting that wood today - so get busy.”

“Oh Boy, you mean I don’t have to study?”

“Later, Ron - later.”

Ron and Roy took the gear out to the wood pile, and filled the chainsaw, then he put on his safety gear, and they lifted a log into the sawhorse, and Ron fired up the chainsaw and started cutting logs to fireplace length. Once he had them all to length, he spent the rest of the day splitting and stacking the wood. After dinner, his Mom told him to get studying the medical books. Roy got a good laugh, remembering what fun he had doing just that almost 15 years ago. Ron started with the Merck Manual and started learning medical terminology. Since he was much younger, and a better student, he covered more material per night than his Dad did. 2 nights later, he was ready to take his first quiz. Anne gave him a verbal exam, and Ron almost got a perfect score. Just like his Dad, he got Q.I.D and qd mixed up

“Like Father, Like Son” Anne chortled.

Later that afternoon, Ron heard Bill’s voice over the radio. “Ron this is Bill - you read me?”

“Go ahead Bill, read you 5x5.”

“Got your first flying assignment tomorrow, Meet Jim in Allakaket at 0800 tomorrow, and you’ll fly to Anchorage, load up with supplies, and fly 3 deliveries then RTB. I’ve already

set up your fuel account, what Jim and I worked out is I bill the delivery fee to the Homesteaders, and deduct your fuel costs, and you get the difference added to your account - will that be OK by you?"

"Sure, it saves me having to write you checks, and then you writing me one. I'd appreciate a monthly statement on a spreadsheet if you wouldn't mind."

"No problem, I have to generate one anyway for my books, I'll just print you a copy. If you fly hunters to lodges, you bill either the lodge or the hunters, and pay for your own fuel. When you fill up in Allakaket, I can charge your account, but you need to set up an account in Anchorage to pay for your fuel there."

"Ok Bill, tell Jim I'll be there at 0800 tomorrow."

"Mom & Dad, guess what, I got my first paying job, Jim and I are delivering supplies tomorrow from Anchorage to some homesteaders out here."

Roy said "Wow, that's great son, I hope you have fun."

Ron spent the rest of the evening studying, and was awake the next morning at first light. Anne made breakfast as soon as Ron was dressed, then they sat down to eat breakfast together as a family. Roy prayed with Ron and asked God's protection and blessing over his Son, then gave him a big hug and told him to have fun. Ron kissed Anne on the cheek, and was out the door like a shot. He did a quick walk around of the Cessna, then jumped in the pilot's seat, did a quick preflight check, then started the engine. Once the engine had warmed up, Ron taxied to the lake, and then turned downwind. When he reached the end of the lake, he set the flaps and rudder to their takeoff positions, and gunned the throttle. When he reached 65 knots, he pulled back on the yoke, and he was airborne. After he cleared the far ridge, he set the plane for a cruise climb to 2,000 feet and turned toward Allakaket. He landed at the lake at 0759, and was taxiing up right at 0800. Jim was ready to go, and as soon as they preflighted the DeHaviland, Ron taxied to the lake and got ready to take off. When he got to the end of the lake, he turned into the wind, set the flaps at 20 % and added some right rudder to compensate for the torque of the engine, then called the tower for permission to take off. The tower cleared him for take off, and he gunned the throttle, and was soon airborne. When he cleared the ridge, he turned for Anchorage, and started a cruise climb to 2,000 feet. When he got close enough to Anchorage, he called the tower for landing clearance. They told him to come on in, the traffic pattern was clear. Remembering what Jim told him the other day, Ron set up for a wheels landing, and did another textbook wheels landing. Jim told him where to taxi to, and was met by a huge panel truck full of stuff. The driver and loader loaded the plane, and Jim checked the inventory sheet against what they were loading, then signed for the shipment. Ron watched and learned.

When they were finished loading, Ron taxied over to the fuel pumps and they both went

inside. The owners of the fuel company called Bill in Allakaket to verify that Ron did indeed have \$10,000 in the bank, and that his credit was good. When everything was approved, they gave Ron a plastic card with a magnetic strip to use the pumps 24/7. They told him he needed to code the card with a PIN, and told him how to do it. He swiped the card through the reader, and entered his PIN. They told him to do it again, and he got a green light telling him the PIN was accepted. Ron put the card in its sleeve in his wallet, right behind his Commercial Pilot's license. They walked out to the pumps, and Ron stuck his card in, and entered his PIN, then started filling the tanks on the DeHaviland. He was amazed at how much avgas the DeHaviland held - this could get expensive. He capped and locked the filler necks to the tanks, then got back aboard. As he taxied to the runway, he did his preflight checklist. When he got to the end of the runway, Jim reminded him that he was about 500 pounds heavy, so the plane would need more runway to take off. Knowing he had 3 times the runway he needed, Ron called the tower and got permission to takeoff, and fly straight to Allakaket, if he stayed at or below 2,000 feet. He double-checked everything was set, then turned to Jim, who gave him a thumbs up, and called "Rolling" over the radio, then advanced the throttle to max. It took a while to get up to speed, but soon he was at 85 knots, and the plane wanted to fly, so he pulled back on the yoke, and the plane was airborne. He made a slight turn for Allakaket, and then set the plane for a cruise climb.

Upon reaching 2,000 feet, he relaxed a little and looked around. The terrain he was flying over was beautiful, and sooner than he expected, he realized he was over Allakaket. He called the tower for permission to land, and they said that everything was clear, come on in. Ron turned to come in on final, and noticed the plane sinking faster as he chopped the throttle, so he pushed it back up a bit. As he cleared the ridge, he remembered the faster sink rate, and didn't chop the throttle all the way to idle. He ballooned down perfectly, and touched down on the lake with just a small splash. He taxied right over to the pumps to top off his tanks, then turned around to taxi and take off again. When he got to the end of the lake, Jim reminded him he was a little heavy, and to leave the throttle at max until he cleared the far ridge, and not to turn until he was at least 500 feet AGL. Ron shoved the throttle to max, and watched the airspeed indicator like a hawk. As soon as the airspeed indicator said 85 knots, he pulled back on the yoke, and cleared the trees by 100 feet. He held that climb until he was 500 AGL, then did a very gentle turn toward the North, where his first customer was. Since he had never been there before, Jim acted as Navigator, and pointed out landmarks Ron could use as a double-check if he were flying alone. Jim told him the names of all the local mountains as he flew past them.

When they got close to the lake, Jim was describing the approach as somewhat between Allakaket and HelpmeJack Lake. He needed a fairly fast sink rate to get down in time, but not like landing the DeHaviland at his lake. He said there was sometimes a cross-wind, so be prepared to turn slightly into the wind to keep from getting blown off course. They flew over the lake, and Jim said "Good news, the wind is dead on,. No cross breeze. Ron set up for landing, extended the flaps, and retarded the throttle to just above idle. He had some throttle left to play with, and he was making a nice conservative approach when Jim said,

“Might give it a little throttle, you’re heavy”. Ron added a few hundred RPM, and Jim seemed happier with the sink rate. The ridge line surrounding this lake was much lower than the ones at HelpmeJack Lake and Allakaket, and as soon as he cleared it, he pushed the throttle in a little to increase his sink rate. He touched down with 50 feet to spare, and slid to a stop with several hundred feet to spare.

“Not bad, Ron. Now you know how much room you have to spare, you can stay on the conservative approach, and not need to dive for the deck.”

“Sorry Gramps - I guess I overestimated the difficulty of the approach.”

“That’s OK. That’s why the FAA wanted me to fly co-pilot for 90 days, so you could make little mistakes, and not crash the plane.”

“Thanks Gramps, I’ll do better next time.”

“I’m sure you will. Now this homestead is off to your right, and the approach is really soft, so take it easy - just coast up until you have to use the throttle, then just barely, and use the yoke to hold the nose up as much as possible.”

Ron did a normal taxi until he got within 50 feet of the shore, then chopped the throttle to idle, and coasted to the shore. When he felt the wheels take over, he just barely tapped the throttle, and held the nose up with the yoke back in his lap. Finally they were on solid ground, and Jim said it was OK to let the nose down now. Ron relaxed his grip on the yoke, and let the nose settle. Jim gave him directions to taxi right up to the cabin, which was a lot smaller than the one Ron lived in. When the plane stopped, and Ron got out, they were met by an old trapper and his dog. Jim walked around the plane to greet him, and introduce Ron.

“Slim, this is my grandson, Ron Williams. He’s going to be the new delivery pilot.”

“Jim - why aren’t you doing it anymore?”

“I can’t pass my FAA physical anymore, so they waived the age limit for a commercial license for Ron, and I’ll be flying with him the next 90 days, then I’ve got to hang up my wings, and go back to being a private pilot.”

“Well Jim, it won’t be the same without you - who could I share my whiskey with - Ron’s too young.”

“Just because I’m not flying deliveries doesn’t mean I’m grounded, just can’t fly commercial anymore. I’ll have the little Cessna Amphibian to fly around with and visit. I intend to get in some fishing while I’m retired. And I know some beautiful little lakes this old bird could never fit in, but the Cessna could do it easy.”

Jim checked the list, and Ron helped him unload about 1/3 of the aircraft. Ron shook Slim's hand, and told him if he needed anything, just call, and gave him their frequency. Then he thought about it, and said "Sorry Slim, I meant you should still call Bill for food and stuff, but if you have an emergency, or need a lift, call me direct on the radio."

"Don't worry there Young Feller, I stuck my foot in my mouth so much when I was a kid, I think I had Athlete's Tongue." They all got a good laugh, and Jim got back aboard, and Ron joined him.

"Ron, Slim's a real character, he's been living out there trapping since the early 1900's. No one knows how old he is, but I'll wager he's one of the oldest living Alaskans around." Ron turned the plane around and taxied back to the lake. Jim said "Ron, you've got plenty of room here, so don't rush it - just like before, when the Airspeed indicator hits 85 knots, not before, or you'll stall."

Ron turned into the wind, set the plane up for takeoff, then looked at Jim, who gave him a thumbs up. Ron pushed the throttle to full, and as soon as the airspeed indicator read 85 knots, he pulled back sharply on the yoke, and they were flying. Ron waited until they were 500 AGL before he changed anything. Jim gave Ron the new heading, and Ron turned the plane. He asked Jim how far it was to the next stop, and Ron said "You might as well stay at 500 feet, because it's only a couple of miles on the other side of that ridge. Oh, and one other thing, when we start unloading, this next stop is a homesteading family just like yours, and he has a 16-year old daughter that is a total babe - watch out though, her Daddy's real protective of her."

"Don't worry Gramps, I'll be a total gentleman."

"Ok, Ron, but when you get a look at her, you might have a hard time keeping your mind on flying."

They saw the lake as soon as they cleared the ridge. The lake was twice the size of the HelpmeJack Lake, but smaller than Allakaket. Since there were no steep ridges around, Ron made a more conservative approach, and made a perfect landing. Jim said "Well done Ron, I hope you weren't showing off."

"Gramps, you know me better than that - besides, I've never met her before, so what's her name anyway?"

"Her name's Samantha, but she goes by Sam. Her Dad's name is Steve, and her mother's name is Mary. Ok, the house is on the left. It's got a nice firm beach, so don't worry about the approach. Just ease it right up like you do at home, and you're fine."

As they taxied up to the house, Ron could see the whole family was on the porch. Jim was

right, Samantha was a total Babe. Ron tried to concentrate on what he was doing, and managed to stop the plane without hitting anything. As soon as the propeller stopped, Ron and Jim hopped out, and Jim made introductions. “Steve, Mary, Sam, this is my grandson Ron Williams. He lives with his mom and dad at HelpmeJack Lake. He’s taking over for me, since the FAA will pull my Commercial ticket in 90 days, when his Commercial ticket restriction clears.”

Steve walked up to Jim. “That’s too bad Jim, but I’m glad that your Grandson is able to take over. Let’s get unloaded, then I know Mary has some lemonade for both of you.”

Samantha cornered Ron “You flew that big monster plane? Wow.”

“Hi Sam, I’m Ron Williams. I did fly Jim’s DeHaviland, but really it’s much easier to fly than the Cessna 185 Amphibian I learned on.”

“Cool, maybe you can teach me to fly one of these days?”

“Sure Samantha, but The FAA won’t let me be an Instructor Pilot until I’m at least 18, and by then I’ll be in the Air Force Academy.”

“Why on earth would you want to go there?”

“Well, the education is free, and I want to fly the F-15 Strike Eagle. Besides, my Uncle is a Colonel in the Air Force assigned to MacDill AFB in Florida.”

“In other words, you’re going to be out of here in a couple of years, and I might never see you again after that.”

“Not exactly Sam, I’m not even 15 yet, and the minimum age I can enter the Academy is when I’m 17 and a half, that’s almost 3 years from now, and I’ll be flying your deliveries from now on; so I’ll see you then.”

“You’re only 14. I thought you were at least 17. Bummer.”

“Sam, I’d rather be friends anyway, even if you’re the most beautiful girl I’ve met.”

“Flatterer - so how many girls have you met?”

“Not counting my mom, just you.”

Sam thought Ron was teasing, then realized he was serious. Man, talk about a Kid.

Just as things were about to get interesting Mary showed up on the porch with a pitcher of

lemonade. “I’ve got some ice cold lemonade in the kitchen, come and get it.”

Ron thought “Saved by the Bell.” and went inside, followed by Samantha who was checking out the back view of Ron. She thought that he was definitely a hunk. They all were seated at the kitchen table. Samantha made sure she sat next to Ron, who did his best not to notice she was coming on to him. When they had drunk their lemonade, Jim said they needed to get another delivery done, and thanks for the lemonade. Samantha tried to corner Ron and give him a kiss, but he was having none of it. She thought he was playing hard to get, and tried harder. Mary caught her daughter moving in on Ron out of the corner of her eye and coughed. Ron slipped out of her clutches and got aboard the plane where it was safe. Jim climbed aboard, grinning like the Cheshire cat, he’d seen it all, and admired Ron’s moves - he managed to avoid her clutches until next time. Little did Ron know that in a few years, he wouldn’t try to avoid her clutches anymore, he would enjoy them. Ron broke all speed records preflighting the plane, and turned it to taxi back to the lake. When he was safely back on the water, Jim decided to give him a hard time. “You’ve got pretty good moves for a rookie - I saw her try to get you in a clinch. You know the next time you’re here, she’ll try harder, because she thinks you’re playing hard to get. All I can say is don’t take advantage of the situation, or you’ll break her heart when you leave to go to the Air Force.”

“Gramps, the farthest I’ll let it go is if she kisses me - I’m not encouraging it. I meant what I told her, I’d rather be friends.”

“Ron, if she has her way, it will be more like kissing cousins.”

They taxied to the downwind end of the lake, and Ron tried to concentrate on flying. The only way he was successful was to recite the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm to clear his mind of Samantha. He turned upwind, and set the plane up for takeoff. He looked at Jim, who gave him a thumbs up. When they were airborne, Jim told him to turn south, they were going to fly about 50 miles to their next stop.

“Gramps, please tell me there aren’t any love-starved teenage daughters at the next house.

Jim had to laugh, “Nope, you got lucky - she’s the only love-starved teenager on the route.”

“Thank God. I don’t think I could handle another one like her.”

“OK, Ron, there’s almost always a cross-wind at the next stop, make sure you turn the nose into the wind.”

“OK, Gramps - let me know when we get close.”

“It’s just on the other side of this ridge, go ahead and drop down to 500 feet, and slow down.”



Ron eased back on the throttle, and cranked out the flaps. Once the flaps were set, he slowed down even more, and spotted the lake, and saw the wind was blowing from left to right, so he kicked in some left rudder, and the nose came into the wind. Jim was pleased that Ron had properly compensated for the cross-wind. As he approached the lake, Ron chopped the throttle to idle, and the plane floated down to the lake. Ron landed smooth as glass, and taxied to the end of the lake.

“Ron, the cabin is on the left, and the bottom is pretty soft, so take it slow.”

Ron coasted to the water's edge, and when he made the transition, he eased the throttle open a little, then taxied to the cabin. They were met by a nice older couple. Ron helped Jim unload the plane, then they taxied back to the water and took off. Jim gave Ron the heading to Allakaket, and they were there less than an hour later. Ron taxied up to the pumps, and was amazed that it only used half a tank - evidently the DeHaviland was pretty good on fuel. When he finished, they taxied to the hangar, and Bill was waiting. When they got out, Bill walked over to Ron and told him that he had gotten 3 terrific reports, and they all thought he would work out great. Bill told Ron that even with the fill-up in Anchorage, Ron cleared \$100 this trip. He usually made between \$100 and \$500 per trip, depending on how much weight he was carrying. Ron thought, “Not bad for 6 hours of flying.” and thanked Bill. He climbed into his Cessna, and topped off the tank before he took off. 2 hours later he was back at home. 15 minutes later, Anne had his nose in a Medical book.

## Chapter 72 - The Hunters

Right before he went to bed, Bill was calling on the radio.

“Ron, this is Bill, you still up?”

“What’s up Bill?”

“I need you to fly 3 hunters to their lodge tomorrow, then other pilot’s plane is down for repairs. I need you to meet Bill at 0700 tomorrow and fly to Anchorage to pick them up at 9:00 at the General Aviation Terminal. I’ve already charged their lodge \$1,000 for the round trip. After fuel and expenses, you’ll clear over \$500 for this trip.”

“Bill \$500 is a lot of money for 6 hours worth of work.”

“I know Ron, but that’s the going rate for Bush pilots, you should have seen what the other guy was charging them.”

“OK, Bill, I’ll be there at 0700 tomorrow.”

“Mom, Dad, Bill needs me to fly some hunters to their lodge tomorrow. It’s unscheduled since the guy who was going to fly them had to take his plane down for repairs. Bill’s paying me over \$500 plus expenses for the round trip.”

Roy spoke up “Ron that’s a lot of money for 1 round trip. Actually, it’s not so bad, I remember how much Ron wanted to fly and guide, it was over \$2,000 for a 3-day trip. OK, you need to go to bed right now, since Bill said you need to be there at 0700. Mom will make sure you’re up at 0430 so you can be there by 0700. I’ll ask mom to pack you some food, since you’re skipping breakfast.”

“Thanks Dad, goodnight.”

Anne knocked on Ron’s door at 0430. “Ron you up?”

“Mom, I’m up and dressed already, go ahead and open the door. I figured out how to set my watch alarm.” Ron walked out fully dressed, and Anne handed him a thermos and a paper sack with a couple of peanut butter & jelly sandwiches. Ron kissed Anne on the cheek, “Bye mom, see you later this afternoon.” Roy gave Ron a big hug, and prayed over him a minute, then Ron had to go. It was just barely light enough to see, so he took his time pre-flighting the Cessna, he didn’t want to miss anything. Finally at 0450, he started the motor and taxied to the lake. While he was taxiing, the engine finished warming up. He turned into the wind when he reached the downwind end of the lake. He double-checked that the

plane was set up to take off, and revved the motor. When the airspeed indicator reached 65 knots, Ron pulled the yoke back into his lap, and the plane took off. He held the climb until he had cleared the ridge, then turned for Allakaket, and cruised up to 2,000 feet. After 2 hours, he called the Allakaket tower, and they gave him clearance to land. He made a textbook water landing, and taxied right to the ramp, and increased throttle to climb the ramp. Since they were in a hurry, he taxied up next to Jim's hangar and shut down. He jumped out, and Jim told him he had already filled the tanks and preflighted the DeHaviland, and they were good to go. Ron jumped into the pilot seat, stowed the thermos and sack lunch, then did a quick pre-flight check, started the motor, and let it warm up for a minute, then turned to taxi out to the lake. He called the tower for clearance to take off and fly to Anchorage. The tower gave him clearance, and asked him to call Anchorage when he was 2 hours out from Allakaket. Ron acknowledged, and quickly set the plane up to take off, then turned upwind when he reached the downwind leg of the lake. He turned to Jim, who gave him a thumbs up, and pushed the throttle to max. The lightly loaded plane lifted off with tons of room to spare, and as soon as he was 500 feet AGL, he turned toward Anchorage and cruise climbed to 2,000 feet.

2 hours later, he called Anchorage Control, who gave him a direct path to the commercial airport, with instructions to stay below 1,000AGL, since the Military base was conducting flight ops. Ron decided to loose the altitude quickly, and put the plane into a diving bank. Jim just looked at him and ruefully shook his head. After all, he was following the tower's instructions. When he was at 1,000 feet, Jim told Ron never to do that with passengers aboard unless it was an absolute emergency. Ron said "I know, straight and level with passengers, but I didn't think you counted as a passenger."

Jim had to agree with Ron's logic. Ron called "Runway in sight" a minute later, then "On Final". The tower acknowledged both calls with a "Roger". Ron made a fast textbook landing, since they were in a hurry. At the end of the runway, Ron directed him the proper gate. The 3 hunters were waiting with their gear when Ron taxied up to them. When he got out, their chins hit their chests - "What's a Kid doing Flying?" Ron stayed aboard for a second since Jim had briefed him about what to do. Jim walked around and introduced himself. One of the Hunters said "There's No way I'm flying with a kid at the controls."

Jim said "First of all, that Kid is my grandson, and he's the best damn bush pilot in the area. Second of all, the FAA gave him his commercial ticket since I can't fly anymore. Thirdly, your fees to the lodge are non-refundable, and you've already been billed for the entire trip, so if you refuse to fly, you forfeit all your money you have paid, and I'm guessing you'd each be out over \$5,000 dollars."

That brought the hunters to a full stop. They weren't a bunch of rich doctors, this was their "Hunt of a lifetime" and they could barely afford it. Jim said "Trust me, Ron knows what he's doing." Jim gave Ron a hand sign, so he got out of the plane, walked over and shook each hunter's hand. They were impressed by his maturity, and combined with the fact that

they'd each be out over \$5K each if they didn't fly, they decided to get aboard. Between Jim and Ron, they got their gear loaded quickly, and the hunters sat in the back seats.

When everything was in place, Ron turned in his seat and said "Welcome to Allakaket Airlines, I'm Ron your pilot, and I'd like to welcome you to the flight. We'll be flying at 2,000 feet, and will be arriving in your lodge in a little over an hour and a half. Please make sure your seats are in the upright and locked position. Pilot to copilot, prepare for takeoff."

The 3 hunters laughed, Ron had done that speech just like the pilot for Alaska Airlines. It broke their nervousness, just as Ron had hoped. He keyed his mike, and received permission to take off. The tower assigned him the #2 position, and told him which runway to use. Jim pointed with his hand, so the passengers couldn't see, but Ron could which way he had to go. When he got to the runway, Ron called again, and he was #1 to take off, and was asked to stay below 1,000 feet AGL until he was 20 miles out, the Military was still conducting flight ops. Ron acknowledged, set the plane up for take-off, and pushed the throttle to the max. It took a while to accelerate, but soon he was at 85 knots airspeed, and he eased back on the yoke, and the plane was airborne. He gradually climbed to 1,000 feet, then turned toward the lodge. Jim had written the bearing and distance on Ron's kneepad that he used for all critical flight information. Once clear of the ATC area, he called the tower, advised them he was 20 miles out, and they authorized a flight level of 2,000 feet. He slowly climbed to 2,000 feet, and an hour later, he spotted the lake the lodge was on. He saw which way the wind was blowing, and turned to land into the wind since there were no clearance issues with this landing. He gradually reduced speed, and fed in more flaps until he was slowly descending to the lake. He cleared the shore by over 100 feet, and floated down to a very soft landing, then taxied over to the lodge's dock. Someone at the dock caught the pontoon, and fastened a rope to the front cleat, then the back one as the plane coasted to a stop. Ron was on the water side, so he stayed put while Jim opened his door and helped them out. The last hunter out turned to shake Ron's hand and said that was the smoothest flight and best landing he had ever seen. Ron thanked him and told him he'd be back to fly them back to Anchorage later.

The hunter got out of the plane, and the guy on the dock unloaded their gear from the plane, and slipped Ron a \$50 that he said was from the hunters. Ron managed a "thank you" before he choked up. Jim closed and locked the back cabin door, and climbed in the front. The dockworker released the cleats, and pushed them away with a logging pole. When they were 6 feet away from the dock, Ron started the motor and taxied the plane to the downwind end of the lake. He had already set the plane up to take off, and when he turned into the wind, set the throttle to max, and was flying with half the lake left. He did a max performance climb-out just like Jim had briefed him. It wasn't necessary for flight safety, but impressed the heck out of the hunters to hear the radial motor of the DeHaviland roaring at full throttle and charging into the air. It gave them a sense of confidence that would be invaluable for the return flight, since they would be looking forward to the flight now. When they landed

at Allakaket, Bill was there to greet the plane with a huge grin on his face. “Ron you did it, the Hunters were still talking about your skill and professionalism. The lodge has agreed to sign a contract to fly their hunters to and from their lodge, and to fly any remote hunters to their camps. You land a couple more contracts like this, and you could easily make \$50K per year.” Ron was stunned, he didn’t know what to say. He remembered the \$50.00 tip and showed Bill. “You keep that - you earned it. I only take 10% off the top for Lodge business as your booking agent. You keep all tips, and everything over and above my fees, and your expenses. All your maintenance and inspections are at cost, and we give you a very preferential rate for labor, since if the DeHaviland goes down for unscheduled maintenance or repairs, I’ll lose a ton of money since I’m part owner of the lodge. We’ll keep it maintained, and you have priority over all other customers for our aircraft mechanic.”

They filled up the tanks, then taxied the plane into the hangar. Ron remembered he hadn’t eaten anything, and was suddenly hungry, so he ate both P&J sandwiches, and washed them down with the hot coffee Anne had packed in the thermos. He climbed into the Cessna, and taxied over to the pumps and filled the tank with Avgas. He was amazed that it had only used \$10 worth of gas. He guessed that the Cessna didn’t use as much fuel per mile as the DeHaviland. When he was finished, he gave his “gramps” a big hug, and said he would see him later. He climbed into the cockpit, and did a quick preflight check, then started the motor. He taxied to the end of the lake, called the tower and received permission to take-off. He quickly set the Cessna up to take-off, and was airborne minutes later. 2 hours later, he arrived at his home lake, and touched down perfectly, then taxied to his front door. When he shut down, Roy, Anne and Lucky were waiting to greet him. He was ready for Lucky this time, and kept from getting knocked over. When he got inside, he told his Mom and Dad all about it. Roy was amazed when Ron related how much Ron could make per year just flying hunters. Doing some quick math in his head, Roy realized Bill was about right.

It looked like Ron wouldn’t need that trust fund he had established for him, then he remembered they needed to build a hangar for the DeHaviland in the next 90 days. He decided to tell Ron about the \$50K he had saved for Ron in a trust fund, and that he wanted to use the money to build a year-round hangar for the DeHaviland next to the cabin. Ron gave his Dad a big hug, then they called Bill. He said he had already located a perfect steel building that was almost twice as big as they needed. It was a good used building that was being dismantled anyway since the owner of the land needed the space. Bill told Ron how big of a space they would need to clear to hold it. Roy decided that their next logging site would have to be where they were going to erect the new hangar. It was heavily insulated and winterized, and had enough room to not only park the plane, but store the pontoons and skis, since during the winter, it was ski-borne instead of pontoon-borne. It even had a chain hoist to pick up the plane and switch the pontoons and skis each season. Roy realized they would need a snow-blower or something to clear a path from the house to the hangar. Bill said he also located a smaller building they could attach to the house that would hold a huge snow blower and enough fuel for the winter. It too was heavily insulated to keep the gasoline from gelling in the winter. Roy was afraid to ask how much it all was going to cost.

Bill said including everything including the snow-blower he could get it installed for under \$40K. Roy told Bill to make it happen, and to take the money out of Ron's trust account, and transfer any remaining balance into Ron's checking account. Bill said that if Ron flew the supply flights and flew the installer crew in and out, he'd save another \$10K, and Bill would cover the fuel costs. Roy said "You've got a deal. We need this finished in the next 90 days so Ron can hangar the DeHaviland here before Jim loses his Commercial Ticket."

"Not a problem Roy. Hurry up and get the trees cleared out of the way, and they can start as soon as you have the trees down. Don't worry about the stumps, they'll remove them."

"OK, Bill, talk to you later."

"Ron, we need to get those trees on the other side of the house felled and out of the way ASAP. I just bought a hangar for your plane, and they can install it in the next 90 days, but we need the trees out of the way first."

Ron gave his dad another big hug. "Thanks Dad, I'll get right on it."

Ron suited up, grabbed the chainsaw, and walked over to the fuel and oil, then carried the chainsaw over to the far treeline. Roy heard the roar of the chainsaw, and later that afternoon, all 20 trees were down. Ron took the next couple of days to haul them over to the sawhorse, cut them to length, and split them to useable sizes. When he wasn't cutting, chopping or stacking wood, Anne had Ron nose-deep in the medical books.

Bill called Ron and said that they were ready to fly the building materials to their cabin. First he needed to pick up the crew and their gear. They would live in a tent outside their cabin while they assembled the building. He told Ron to pick them up in Allakaket at 0800 tomorrow.

The next morning, Ron arrived at Allakaket at 0800 on the dot, and they already had the DeHaviland loaded, fueled, and ready to go. Jim was standing there with the 3 men who would install the building. Ron looked confused, then remembered the FAA restrictions on his ticket, and realized Jim had to come with him, even if it meant they couldn't load as much gear or supplies. They all boarded, and Ron ran through the checklist as the engine warmed up. Jim reminded Ron that he was taking off at max take-off weight, so he needed to take it easy when he lifted off, or the pontoons might separate, since some of the stuff was lashed to the pontoons to make room inside. Ron nodded and continued to set the plane up for take-off. Jim suggested going to 30% flaps instead of 20% to give them extra lift. Ron nodded and set the flaps at 30%, then turned into the wind when he had gone as far downwind as he dared. When he turned upwind, he looked at Jim, who gave him a thumbs up, and Ron pushed the throttle to full, and held on for dear life. The plane slowly accelerated, and he thought it would never get to 85 knots indicated. As soon as it reached 85 knots, Ron pulled back gently on the yoke, and cleared the trees on the ridge by a bare 50

feet. Jim turned grinned, and gave Ron a thumbs up. Ron didn't climb any higher than he had to, and set out for home. Jim reminded him he was real heavy, and would have a huge sink rate, so go easy on slowing down. When he was lined up to land, Ron slowly reduced throttle until he had established the sink rate he wanted. As he cleared the ridge, he just tapped the throttle in some more, and was sinking quickly to the lake. Ron realized he was sinking too fast, and added throttle, but just what he had taken out. It wasn't the prettiest landing he had ever made, but they were down in one piece, and he didn't hurt the plane. After they had unloaded the plane, Ron took a look at the huge pile of stuff. He knew the exact max takeoff weight of the DeHaviland Otter, and they were easily 10-20% over max listed take off weight. Ron pointed this out to Jim, and he admitted the max takeoff weight was a very conservative number, and it could safely be exceeded by 30%.

"You just had to be aware of the overload situation, and fly accordingly, like be more conservative in your throttle settings on landing, since the extra weight makes you sink like a rock." Then he said, "By the way, good recovery, adding throttle was exactly the correct thing to do. Next time you're overloaded like that, keep some energy in reserve. You can always loose airspeed faster than you can gain it."

Ron and Jim flew back and forth from Allakaket to their cabin and made 4 trips fully loaded. By the end of the day, they were both tired, but all the supplies were at Ron's house, and the builders had started clearing the stumps and leveling the spot. When they were finished, they set up concrete forms and unrolled the reinforcing wire grid for the concrete floor, then positioned and tied the anchor bolts into the wire for the steel building. The next day, they would pour the concrete floor, and asked Roy if he had any hot water. Roy told them he had running hot and cold water, and asked them how much they would need. He said they needed to pour a 6 inch slab for a 50x20 foot building or about 19 cubic yards of concrete, and they wanted 60-80 degree water. Roy said "No problem, I can get you boiling running water, and you can combine that with the 40 degree water coming out of the tap. The guy whipped out his calculator, and figured how much 220 degree water he'd need to add to 40 degree water to get 80 degree water. When he told Roy, he replied "I guess we should keep the stove fired up most of the morning, good thing Ron chopped all that extra wood." They had a 5-gallon bucket to haul water, and it barely fit in their sink. Anne asked if they would like a home-cooked meal, and the foreman said they would kill for one, so Anne invited them inside for dinner. It was crowded, but they all fit. Roy said grace, and they all ate dinner. They went back outside to their tent and campfire, and Ron went back to his studies.

The next morning after Breakfast, Ron volunteered to help, and they put him to work hauling water with the wheeled cart. After about 20 trips he was tired, but they needed more water, so he kept hauling water until they were finished pouring concrete. They spent the rest of the day compacting and floating the concrete, making sure the floor was sloped correctly for drainage. Ron took the rest of the day off, and went back to his studies.

The next morning, the concrete was set enough to start assembling the building. Since all

the parts were marked, it went up fairly fast, and the frame was in place the first day, and the skin was ready to go on. They had Ron run to Allakaket for some more supplies and he came back with Jim and a load of insulation. Since insulation was light, they packed the plane as tight as they could, and put a sheet of plywood behind their seats so they could stack the rolls of insulation to the ceiling and into every nook and cranny of available space. They did such a good job of packing that they got the entire load in one trip, and were able to carry more supplies on the pontoons as well.

The next day, they bolted the skin onto the frame, and sprayed it with a waterproofing coating to make it 100 % waterproof. The coating had pigment added, so they didn't need to paint it. The hangar was slate grey, and would stay relatively warm during the winter, without being beastly hot in the summer. Once they had the coating on the outside, they covered the inside with Visqueen, then started laying the insulation over the visqueen and between the frames, and installing the visqueen that covered the insulation. They didn't need or want wallboard on the curved walls, so the visqueen served to hold the insulation in, and acted as a vapor barrier on both sides of the insulation, making it much more efficient. Then they installed a small Franklin stove in the building for heat in case they needed to work inside the building during the winter, and installed the vent pipe. The final things they did were to install the chain hoist, and hang the door. They used a huge roll-up commercial door, since a tilt-up would be impossible to use in the Alaskan winter.

The next day they packed their stuff back into the plane, and Ron flew them to Allakaket. He had to get Jim and the plane first, so he made deliveries on his way out to help pay for the fuel. While he was delivering stuff, he picked up the shed to hold the snow blower then added 4 5-gallon cans of Avgas. The mechanic in Allakaket had re-tuned the motor to run on Avgas, since they didn't deliver regular gas anymore since the PBY had crashed years ago. All they got was Avgas, Diesel and Kerosene. Jim called his buddy in the FAA, told him that Ron was ready to fly by himself, and the hangar was done at their house. Dan gave Ron verbal permission to fly Solo, but to be careful, since his unrestricted Commercial had to wait the full 90 days, since he couldn't change things in the FAA computer without calling attention to himself. He said that if Jim was available, and he had the space, to keep flying with Jim, but he didn't have to. Since the Cessna was already at Allakaket, Ron flew the DeHaviland home and put it in his hangar at home.



## Chapter 73 - Ron gets a Kit

The next morning Roy thought of something, and was soon out looking at the Otter. He found a space just about the size of a large shoebox underneath the pilot's seat that couldn't be used for anything else. He found a large shoebox that would fit, took it in the house, and asked Ron "You have the fanny pack, the knives, the .44 Magnum with 2 6-shot reloads, and the .22 pistol with 2 spare 15 round magazines. I found a space underneath your seat that wasn't being used for anything, and I wanted us to make a list of stuff that would fit in this box that you could use for an extended survival kit."

Ron sat down and started writing. He had a knife and a <skip> just like his Dad, he had the weapons, and he had a pretty good mini-kit in his fanny pack. He thought of several items: A box of 50 .44 Magnum rounds (self-defense and hunting), a box of 100 .22 shells, Underwear, socks, first aid supplies. Roll of 10/50 Spyderwire, Roll of snare wire, 12 Cam locks for snare wire, dozen 8d nails, bottle of Polar Pure Plus, Salt & Pepper, 12 Ramen Seasoning packs, bag of Lemon drops, Tea bags, Lifeboat rations, extra hexamine tabs for his canteen stove, a couple of extra contractor grade trash bags, chemical hand warmers, couple of light sticks, spare compass and maps, LED headlamp with spare batteries. Ron was tempted to write in "ET Phone HOME Satellite Phone" but it would cost thousands of dollars, and might not survive a rough landing, or the batteries could conk out at the worst possible moment.

Next he took the list and prioritized it, and tried to get everything to fit. He had to leave 1 of the 3 contractor bags he tried to put in it. That left 2 in the kit. Ron walked over to Roy and showed him the kit and the list, and then told his Dad that he'd need a separate book bag or bigger sized winter kit to carry his cold-weather gear that he couldn't wear while flying the plane, like a Bivy bag tent, mummy sleeping bag, cold weather provisions (chocolate bars and cocoa), mittens and polypropylene balaclava and glove liners. He wanted a SEVA stove and a quart of denatured alcohol, along with the pot and a mess kit. He'd make sure he had a complete winter kit months in advance. Roy thought that Ron was definitely taking after him.

The next thing they knew Bill's voice was on the radio. "Ron are you there?"

"Hi Bill, what's up?"

"Got a call from that lodge that you delivered the 3 hunters to, they've got their Caribou early, and are ready to go home; can you fly over there in an hour and pick them up?"

"What about Jim?"

"Jim said you can handle it, there aren't any landing or take-off issues, and the FAA said it

was OK for you to fly alone. They have to be in Anchorage in 4 hours to catch their flight home, or they have to stay another day in Anchorage. I already cleared it with the lodge and the hunters. Hurry up and get in the air, and call me when you pick them up.”

Flying directly from their cabin to the lodge would cut almost 3 hours off the trip, and save a huge amount of avgas. If Jim said it was OK, he could do it. Roy heard the radio, and had Ron’s gear all ready to go, and helped Ron into his shoulder holster and fanny pack, then handed him the box. Ron still had the change from the \$100 if he had to stay the night, so he was good to go. He kissed his Mom, and Roy prayed with him, and he ran out to the hangar carrying his box of gear. He slid the shoe box under the seat, and it fit easily, then he walked around the plane, then jumped inside and quickly preflighted the plane, then started the motor, and let it warm up while he finished his preflight checks. He had already written the compass bearing and distance to the hunting lodge, and the bearing and distance from there to Anchorage, so he was good to go. He goosed the throttle, and he was taxiing to the lake. When he had made it to the downwind end of the lake, he already had the plane set up to take off, and had completed all his safety checks. He turned upwind, shoved the throttle to max, and watched the airspeed indicator like a hawk. As soon as it read 85 knots, he pulled back on the yoke, and he was flying. He was enjoying the feeling of freedom flying this huge powerful plane by himself. When he had cleared ridge and was over 500 feet AGL, he turned toward the lodge and cruise climbed to 1,000 feet since he was only going to be flying an hour and landing again.

An hour later, he spotted the lodge and the lake right where it was supposed to be. He spotted the windsock, and realized there was a slight cross-breeze, but not enough to make it exciting. He turned on final, then turned the nose of the plane into the wind as he descended to the lake. He made a picture perfect landing, and taxied to the dock, where the same guy tied him fast, then opened the back door and loaded all the stuff. With their Caribous, it was pretty packed back there, and he asked if someone would like to fly up front in the co-pilot seat. They all were eager to fly up front, so he settled it by drawing straws. The winner hopped in front, and noticed Ron’s hardware. He joked, “Aren’t you a little young to be armed to the teeth like that?”

“Not out here sir, if for some reason the plane went down, I’d have to survive with what I had on me.”

“Well let’s hope that doesn’t happen.”

“Yes sir, if you’d close the door and buckle in, we’re ready to go.”

He reached over, pulled the cabin door closed, then buckled his seatbelt, then the dockworker waved at him, and pushed the plane away from the dock. Ron started the motor, and taxied to the downwind end of the lake. Since they were a little heavy, he went as far downwind as he could, then he turned upwind, and set the flaps to 30%. Once he was set, he

pushed the throttle to full, and held on until the airspeed indicator said 85 knots, and he gently pulled back on the yoke. He climbed gently to 500 feet, then turned southwest to Anchorage, and cruise climbed to 2,000 feet. He called Bill as he reached altitude, and said he'd be in Anchorage in a little over 2 hours. Knowing that the passengers could hear his radio, Bill said, "Roger, well Done, advise me when you plan to return to Allakaket."

The Hunters spent the rest of the flight looking out the windows, or talking about their hunt. 2 hours later, Ron called Anchorage Control, and was given a straight in approach, since the pattern was empty. Ron slowly stepped down from 2,000 feet to 500 feet as he got closer to the airport. When he had the runway in sight, he called "Final" and cranked the flaps to full, and remembered to lower the landing gear. He slowly eased in the throttle, until he was losing altitude just about right. He crossed the runway threshold about 50 feet in the air, and slowly settled to the runway without a bounce. He knew he had a long taxi, so he stayed off the brakes, and let the plane run to the end of the runway. He remembered which way to turn for the commercial terminal, and the Tower had said Gate 20. He saw gate 12, and kept taxiing until he saw gate 20. There as a ground crew member to direct him into a parking stall, and a skycap to supervise the unloading and transfer of their baggage to the appropriate airline. He shut off the engine, and when the prop stopped turning, he opened his door, and the other hunters opened theirs and crawled out. Walking around to flex stiff legs, the first hunter, who had originally made the crack about flying with a kid, shook Ron's hand, and slipped him a \$20. The other hunters did the same, and they thanked him for a job well done, and they would make sure to pass the word that Ron Williams was a good bush pilot who could be trusted.

With his plane unloaded, he checked his watch. He was over 2 hours away from Allakaket, and another hour away from home, and he had less than 4 hours of daylight left - too close for comfort. He hopped back in the DeHaviland and taxied to the fuel pumps, topped off the tanks, then taxied to the FAA offices. Dan was still there, and Ron asked if he could borrow his phone. He dialed Bill's number, "Hello Bill, It's Ron. I'm in Anchorage, and I think it's too late to head back to Allakaket tonight, so I'll stay here in Anchorage tonight."

"Ron, that's why I told you to call - I thought it might be too late. Dan will drop you off at the hotel you stayed at last time. I've already taken care of the bill, just pay for your own dinner. I'll see you tomorrow morning."

"Bill, can you tell my folks I'm staying over in Anchorage, and I'll see them tomorrow?"

"Sure Ron, anything else?"

"No that's all - thanks for everything."

When they hung up, Dan told Ron he'd drive Ron to the hotel in half an hour when he was ready to go home. Ron asked if there was anything he could do to help.

“I’ve got everything done I need to do by 10:00 every morning, I just have to keep the office open. You want to check out some maps I have?”

“Sure, where are they?”

Dan showed Ron several maps that showed the entire state of Alaska, and various regions. He noticed that the maps were in UTM and Lat/long format. Ron asked Dan about that. “Ron, UTM coordinates are used by the Military and they also work in GPS navigation systems. GPS stands for Global Positioning Satellite. There’s a huge constellation of satellites that orbit the earth and stay over the same spot on the earth. The GPS receiver picks up their radio signals and triangulates your position anywhere on the earth. They make map software that can locate the UTM coordinates of any spot on the map, then all you have to do is enter the UTM coordinates of that spot into your GPS unit as a waypoint, and the unit will tell you which way to go, how close/far you are, and how fast you are going. You can buy a good one for a couple of hundred dollars and have it installed in your plane, including an external antenna. Then all you have to do is enter waypoints for everywhere you travel, and name the waypoints like HOME, Allakaket, Anchorage, etc. Then all you have to do is bring up the way point list, and select the one you want to fly to, and the GPS unit does the rest. A lot of the pilots in Alaska are buying them, because compasses can be seriously inaccurate around here due to the rapidly changing magnetic declination in some parts of Alaska.”

“Thanks Dan, I’ll check on the internet when I get home. I’m definitely going to have some spending money, and it looks like a GPS is a good piece of gear to have.”

Dan tapped a couple of commands on his keyboard, and printed a list of websites, and prices for the best units in his opinion. He also included several different versions of map software that were GPS compatible, and could download maps and waypoints to GPS units. When he finished, he realized it was time to go home, and ushered Ron out of the office, shut the lights off and locked the door. He drove Ron to the hotel, where Ron checked in, checked his guns, and went to dinner. When he came back, he asked the clerk if they had an Internet connection he could use to look up some GPS equipment. She knew he was a pilot, and said it would be OK to use hers. She had to do some paperwork anyway. She let Ron behind the counter, and showed him where the computer was, and in minutes, he was surfing the internet, looking for GPS units. He found several, then noticed the ones that were sold in the Aircraft sites were 3 times the cost of the same portable unit with an external antenna. Ron knew if he could hard-mount the antenna to the roof, he could Velcro the unit to the dash, and connect it to the plane’s power system and have a portable unit so he could take it back and forth to the computer if he needed to download new waypoints. He located several map software programs that said they were compatible with the GPS unit he was thinking about, so he printed up all the information, and told the clerk he was done. She asked him to log off the internet, so he did. He went to bed shortly thereafter, and got up at first light. Bill had already paid his hotel bill, and Ron helped himself to a cinnamon roll and some

coffee, then asked the clerk to call a cab for him. 5 minutes later, a cab pulled up, Ron claimed his checked weapons, and walked to the cab and got in. He asked the driver to drop him off at the FAA building near the airport. The driver dropped him right in front of the FAA building, and he paid the driver, plus a tip, and got out.

Ron saw the light on, and went inside the FAA building. Dan was seated at his desk drinking his first cup of coffee. Ron showed him what he had come up with over the internet, and Dan thought it would be an excellent idea for a light plane. Most of those big GPS units he saw on the Airplane sites were designed for much bigger aircraft. Dan knew the Magellan GPS units took an external antenna, and he was pretty sure one was a hard mount instead of a mag mount. He doubted that a mag-mount antenna would hold up to the top speed of the DeHaviland. He thought he idea of Velcroing the unit to the dash was excellent, and he thought an aircraft mechanic could wire a cigarette lighter plug into the plane's electrical systems easily. The Magellan had a cigarette lighter adapter, and came with a USB cable to connect to a computer to upload and download maps. He knew most of the map software was compatible with the Magellan brand GPS receivers. The only thing Ron needed to decide was how much memory he needed to store maps. If he were just flying around from Anchorage to Allakaket and the vicinity, he could get by with the smallest memory, but if he wanted to travel, he might use the bigger one especially if he wanted to navigate in a foreign city. That point settled it, he had the money now, and he could easily afford the best Magellan unit. For about \$450 plus shipping, he could buy a Magellan color GPS unit that could later be upgraded to 64MB of memory and "World Streets Maps" software to navigate in foreign cities. It came with 16MB of memory, and the US Topo map software, a Cigarette Lighter adapter, swivel mount bracket, and a Titan II remote hard-mount antenna and 15 feet of cable, which would be more than enough to locate the antenna on the roof. The combination would allow him to locate spots on the ground plus or minus 3 feet, and give him real-time data on position, altitude, distance to waypoint, and time to waypoint at current speed. The color display would really come in handy later, if he wanted to use it. The next cheapest unit was only \$50 less, and wouldn't take an external antenna. Ron had guessed correctly that the metal skin of the airplane might attenuate the signal from the GPS satellites. Now all he had to do was convince his parents.

## Chapter 74 - Coming Home

Ron left for Allakaket soon after that, and called the tower when he was close. He received permission to land, and flew straight in, and taxied right up to the pumps and topped off the tanks. The plane mechanic said he would tow it to the hangar, since Bill needed to see him. Ron walked over to Bill's Jeep, and Bill had a big grin on his face. "Ron, the contracts are just rolling in, seems every lodge in the area wants you to fly for them, you're going to be busy for the next couple of weeks. Jim said he wasn't feeling too hot, so you can go ahead and fly them without him. I put \$100 in your account as a bonus for yesterday."

"Thanks Bill. I was talking to Don at the FAA office, and he suggested I get a GPS unit for the plane, not one of those big expensive units they advertise in the airplane sites, but a nice hand held with an external antenna. Magellan makes a color GPS that takes an external antenna, they have a swivel mount to mount it to the dash, and a cigarette lighter adapter. Here, I've got all the info. I'll call you this afternoon if my parents say it's OK."

"Ron, if your parents approve, I'll have the mechanic install the cigarette lighter connection to the electrical system, mount the base and the antenna, and I'll pay his fee, since this will save you a bunch of time, and will make things much safer to boot."

"Thanks Bill, I'll let you know this afternoon."

Ron walked back over to his plane. Since the mechanic hadn't towed it yet, he just turned it around after doing a walk-around, and taxied back out to the lake. While he was setting up to take off again, he called the tower and got permission to take off. When he was at the downwind end of the lake, he turned into the wind, checked the flaps and rudder, and pushed the throttle to full. The lightly loaded plane lifted off smartly at 85 knots, and he cleared the ridge easily. Just over an hour later, he was over his home lake, and turned to land. Landing the lightly loaded plane was a cake walk compared to landing it when it was heavily loaded, and almost had to will it down. Finally the plane landed, and he taxied to the cabin, jumped out and opened the hangar door, and taxied inside. He realized that he should call ahead from now on, and ask his parents to open the hangar door, since getting out with the prop still turning was dangerous, even at idle.

Roy, Anne, and Lucky were still there to greet him, and then he told them all about his experience flying by himself in the big plane. He told them what Dan and Bill said about the GPS. "You know Dad, if Ron Fellows had a GPS unit, none of us would be here."

"How do you figure that Ron?"

"Easy, If he'd programmed the GPS before he left Anchorage with the waypoints and destination of the flight, the computer would have told him where he was all the time, the

bearing and distance to his next waypoint, and his altitude. Even if he got lost in the clouds, GPS reads right through clouds, and he would have known right where he was, and could easily have corrected his course. He would have flown right to the caribou camp, and not wound up lost way off course. Best of all, they only cost \$500, and Bill said he'd pay for the installation. Bill gave me a \$100 bonus today, so I made \$600 or more on this flight, after paying all my expenses. Bill said every lodge in the area wants me to fly for them - the word is getting around fast."

"Ok Ron, sounds like a good investment."

"Great, I need to call Bill so he can order it, and have the mechanic install it."

Ron walked to the radio. "Bill, this is Ron, go ahead and order it. Let me know when you need the plane to install it."

"Roger Ron, will let you know when it's in. You've got a cargo flight tomorrow, so get here at 0800, since you need to fly to Anchorage."

"Bill, I've got enough fuel to make Anchorage easily, flying direct from here will save me several hours, any reason I need to stop in Allakaket?"

"Negative, just remembered Jim didn't feel like flying. OK, call me when you're in the air tomorrow morning."

"Roger, over and out."

Ron set his watch alarm for 0700, so he'd have plenty of time to get up, get dressed, pre-flight the plane, and be wheels-up by 0800 bound for Anchorage.

He spent the rest of the day chopping wood, since Roy had taken over the gardening and other non-strenuous stuff. He still enjoyed fishing, and they had fish for dinner 2-3 nights a week. Ron knew they had several months yet before they needed to hunt. He thought what a BMG-50 would do to a Caribou - probably turn it into hamburger. Guess he still was going to hunt with the .308. Ron wondered where he had deliveries tomorrow. He wondered if he would get to see Samantha. He wondered what she was like when she wasn't trying to kiss his lips off. Ron thought he had better concentrate on the task at hand, since he was splitting wood, and wanted to keep all his extremities. Later that afternoon, he finished his chores, and joined his Dad to spend some time fishing. They walked down to the lake, and after they had cast their lines in the water and sat down, Roy turned to Ron and had one of those "Father and Son moments".

"Ron, I'm so proud of you, you've become a man in a short time, I'm glad you haven't let any of this go to your head, and you seem to be growing up and maturing. Your Mom and I

pray nightly that God would watch over and guide you, and I know he has. I don't know how much longer I have, but I'm really glad I was able to be around to see you grow up. I just wish it wasn't so fast or suddenly, but things happen. I'm pleased you've been able to handle the extra responsibility. Jim says you've done very well flying the plane by yourself. Just promise me you'll be careful. Remember, there are old pilots, and bold pilots, but few old bold pilots."

"Dad, that's one of my favorite sayings. That's why I didn't try to fly home last night. I had enough light to make it, but what if I ran into a headwind, or a mechanical complication. It was far safer to remain where I was, and fly home the next day. Besides, I ran into Dan, and he was the one that told me about the GPS receivers and software. They have topo maps of the entire US on CD-ROMs, and I can download the entire state of Alaska into my GPS, and mark all my destinations as waypoints, and I can fly point to point, saving gas and time, since it tells me how far to my next waypoint, so I don't waste fuel climbing higher than I need to, and I can start descending right when I need to. Also this way, I don't have to use landmarks to navigate with, and can fly point to point, shaving time and miles off my routes. The altitude function will double check my altimeter, since it's vulnerable to weather-related fluctuations."

"Wow, I didn't realize they did all that."

"I'm still carrying my compasses, since if the batteries die, there goes your gizmo."

Roy thought "Smart Kid."

They caught several large fish, and Ron helped Roy clean and skin them, and Anne fried a couple for dinner. Roy smoked the rest. Ron thought of something, and called Bill.

"Bill, this is Ron - do you read me?"

"Still here, just about to pack it in for the night."

"Can you change my order for me, and add the NiMh battery pack to the order. I thought if the batteries were rechargeable, the Cigarette Lighter could charge the batteries, and keep them charged overnight when I wasn't using it, and in the event of an emergency if I had to leave the plane, I'd have a fresh set of batteries in it. I'll carry a set of spares in my emergency kit, but the NiMh batteries sound like a good idea."

"Ron, you're lucky, I haven't ordered it yet, I was going to do that in a few minutes. I'll see if they can throw in a case for it, so you can carry it on you if you need to."

"Thanks Bill. I intend to be wheels up tomorrow at 0800 headed for Anchorage, so I should be there around 11:00 tomorrow."



“OK, I’ll tell the delivery driver to expect you around 1100 tomorrow, could you still call me tomorrow when you take off?”

“Sure, I’ll call you when I’m at altitude so the radio reaches further.”

“Ron, you should be able to reach Allakaket from the ground, you’re radio is more powerful than the one in the cabin, and it’s got a better antenna.”

“OK, thanks for the info, Bill. I’ll call you while I’m warming up then.”

“Roger, out.”

Ron turned off the radio, took out the charger, and spent the next half hour cranking the generator to ensure the battery had a full charge. When it was fully charged, Ron switched the radio back to standby, which would save a ton of power, but let them listen to the radio. When he was finished, Anne said that dinner was ready, so he washed his hands, then sat down to eat. After dinner, he studied his medical books, and went to bed.

His alarm went off at 0700 the next day, and he got dressed quickly, and Anne had packed a thermos of hot coffee and sandwiches, since he didn’t have time for breakfast. He kissed his mom, and Roy prayed with him, then he was out the door. It was cold, so he was glad he was wearing his jacket over his shoulder holster and fanny pack. He opened the roll-up doors, and using his flashlight, did a walk around, then climbed aboard, started the engine to let it warm up while he checked gauges and switches. At 7:45, he bumped the throttle out of idle, and taxied slowly to the lake. Once he was clear of the house, he switched to Bill’s frequency and keyed the mike. “Bill, this is Ron, I’m taxiing to the lake, and should be airborne at 0800 en route to Anchorage.”

“Roger, Ron have a good flight, see you later. Over and out.”

Ron switched the radio back to Allakaket Control, since it was the only frequency in the area that was always monitored. His radio had a GUARD setting, but he didn’t have enough power to hit Anchorage from here, so the Guard frequency was only useful when he was in range. He thought he should replace the radio with one more powerful, but that would cost thousands of dollars, and this one worked fine. He taxied onto the lake, and headed downwind while he set the plane up to take off. Since he was lightly loaded, he set the flaps to 20%, and set the rudder to compensate for the engine’s torque. When he reached the end of the lake, he turned upwind, made a quick sweep of all his gauges, and pushed the throttle to full. At 85 knots, he pulled back on the yoke, and he was flying. He turned southwest to Anchorage, and 2 hours later, entered the ATC, so he called Anchorage Control to ask for landing instructions. The controller recognized his tail number, and gave him a straight in vector, since the pattern was empty. When he had the runway in sight, he called “Final” and set the flaps to full, and reduced throttle. He remembered to maintain no more than a 20

degree nose-up attitude, and to deploy the landing gear. When he was over the runway threshold, he chopped the throttle, and floated down to a perfect touchdown, then set the nose down gently. He stayed off the brakes until he came to the end of the runway, and turned to taxi to the ramp where the delivery truck met him last time.

He saw the truck, and stopped next to it. Evidently they were expecting him, since no one asked “Where’s Jim”. He helped them load the plane, and checked each item off the packing list as it went in, and made sure the load was balanced front to rear and left to right. He had a second list showing who ordered what, so he could deliver their orders. He saw Samantha’s family on the list, and knew he could visit her today. He noticed the list of deliveries was short, and most of them were on this end of his route. Thinking fast, he worked out a route where he could deliver everything but Samantha’s house, fill up in Allakaket, and stop at Samantha’s on the way home. It would save a ton of gas, and it would allow him to spend the maximum time at her place. He was wondering why he wanted to spend so much time at her place when he realized that the plane was loaded, and they were waiting on him. He made a show of checking the list to get his head out of the clouds, and realizing it was all there, signed the packing list and gave them a carbon. He kept the original for Bill, and the delivery list for his use. He made sure the doors were locked, did a quick walk-around, and taxied over to the fuel depot, where he filled his tanks as full as he could. All of his deliveries except Sam’s place were off a direct-line route to Allakaket, so it would be a piece of cake. Once everything was secured, he taxied to the runway, and called for permission to take off. He was heavy but not overloaded, so he left the flaps at 20 percent, and when he received permission, turned onto the active runway, called “Rolling”, and pushed the throttle to max. It took a while to reach 85 knots, but he had 3 times the runway he needed, so he didn’t sweat it. When it finally reached 85 knots, he pulled back on the yoke, and he was flying. He cruise climbed back to 2,000 feet, and 2 hours later, spotted his first delivery.

He turned so he was lined up for landing, and kissed the water with hardly any splash. He spotted the cabin right off the lake, and carefully transitioned to the land, then taxied up to their house. It was a younger family with 3 kids, and Ron noticed most of the order was diapers and baby stuff, evidently they still had kids young enough to be in diapers. They helped him unload, and thanked him. He climbed back in the plane, taxied back out, and turned upwind while setting the plane up to take off again. Since the next place was right over the ridge, he’d just climb out to 500 feet above ground level, and be ready to land as soon as he got up. He went to full throttle, and was soon flying. He spotted his next delivery right over the ridge, and chopped the throttle to land while cranking the flaps out to full. The next landing was as smooth as the first, and they only ordered a few cases of canned food, so it only took less than ½ hour to unload and turn around. His next delivery was about 20 miles away, so he thought he should climb a little higher, maybe 1,000 feet AGL, but no higher. He taxied to the end of the lake, and turned upwind while setting up for take-off. He turned into the wind and shoved the throttle to full, and as soon as he was 500 feet AGL, he turned to his new heading. He let the plane slowly climb to 1,000 feet, and

soon he spotted his next delivery. He cranked the flaps out, and cut the throttle to land, and was 3 for 3 on perfect landings. They took 2/3 of what was left in the plane, and he was back in the air within 45 minutes, winging to Allakaket.

He called Allakaket Control and requested landing permission. He landed, taxied to the fuel pumps, filled the tanks, checked the oil, washed the windows, and did a walk-around. When everything was full, he secured the caps, taxied out to the lake, and turned upwind when he reached the end of the lake. He set the throttle to full, and was flying sooner than he expected. He pulled the yoke back, and cleared the ridge easily. He made a bee-line for Samantha's house, and an hour later, he spotted their lake. He noticed a slight cross-breeze, so when he set up to land, turned slightly into the breeze so he wouldn't be blown off course. He made a perfect landing, and coasted up to their cabin. Samantha was waiting for him on the porch. As soon as the propeller stopped, and he opened the door, he didn't even have a chance to catch his breath and say HI when Samantha laid a rather passionate kiss on him. This time he didn't resist, but he didn't encourage her either. He did think she was a really good kisser when she finally came up for air - which coincided with her mom arriving on the porch and coughing. The two of them unloaded the plane, and Ron saw Sam's dad Steve cleaning his guns. He had a beautiful Colt 1911 Officer's gun that he had disassembled, and was ready to clean. Sitting down, Ron asked "Mind if I help?"

Steve looked at Ron, and saw the hardware he was packing. "That's a mighty nice .44 Magnum you're packing, mind if I look at it?"

Ron eased it out of the holster, being careful where he pointed the barrel, and opened the crane, dumped the rounds into his hand, and handed the gun barrel down, and crane open to Steve. Steve was impressed with Ron's gun handling knowledge. He'd never trust Samantha with a cannon like that. He got a good look at it, and noticed it was a Colt Anaconda, one of the preferred guns for guides out here. "Ron, do you guide as well as fly?"

"Not yet sir, My Dad came up here about 16 years ago, and Ron Fellows was his guide. He told him to pack a gun just like this since he'd need it if he ran into any bears while he was hunting. When he married my mom, and she moved into his cabin at the HelpmeJacks, he gave her one just like it. A couple of years ago, I lost a dog when he saved me from a bear attack. All I had was this .22 pistol, but I emptied every round I had into that damned bear to save my dog, but he bled to death before we could stop the bleeding. My dad realized I needed something more powerful than a .22 if I was going to live up here, and the gunsmith said I might as well learn to shoot the .44 Magnum, since a .357 might not do the job, and the heavier gun was easier to shoot. So I learned to shoot my Mom's gun with some light loads he made up. After a couple of boxes, I graduated to the full-house rounds I'm carrying now."

"You went toe to toe with a bear armed with only a .22 pistol?"

“Steve, I had to try and save my dog. I hoped I’d get a lucky hit and kill it, I did, but not before that damned bear killed my dog.”

Steve realized Ron was a really special kid. He had raw courage, brains, and a whole lot of self-control. He saw the end of that kiss Samantha laid on him, and Ron’s reaction. He definitely enjoyed it, but wasn’t encouraging her to continue.

“Ron, what are your intentions with my daughter?”

“Steve, I don’t understand?”

“Samantha is boy-crazy, and it seems you’re the only boy around here even close to her age. I saw that kiss she laid on you, and I’m amazed at your self-control. She gets her passion from her Mom.”

“Steve, I really just want to be her friend, I’m planning on going to the Air Force Academy at 17 and a half. My uncle Steve and his General have already greased the skids for me to enter the academy. I want to be a fighter pilot, and I won’t do anything to jeopardize that. I told Jim that I wanted to be friends with Samantha, and Jim said that if Samantha had her way, more like kissing cousins.”

Steve practically fell off his chair laughing. “I can live with that.”

They finished cleaning his guns, and Steve handed Ron back his Colt Anaconda. Mary asked Ron if he wanted to stay for lunch. He said he could, since he was finished with his deliveries. Samantha heard the good news, and took him outside to try and land another lip lock on him. Ron was stronger than her, and held her at arms length.

“Sam, I like you a lot, but you’re going to have to cool it. I don’t want this to go any further physically. I’m going to be here until I’m almost 18, and I really need a friend my own age. I don’t mind kissing you, but I’m afraid you might want more. I can’t screw up my chances to get in the Air Force Academy, My parents and my uncle would kill me.”

Samantha acted all hurt and disappointed, but she got over it quick, and gave him a kiss just to prove it.

“Ron, I heard you tell my Dad you killed a bear with only a .22 pistol?”

“Well if you heard that, you heard the rest of the story. My favorite dog died in the process of saving me, and I was trying to kill the bear before it killed my dog.”

“Still I think you’re pretty brave, and cute too.”

“Cool your jets Sam.”

“I like the way you say my name - my Dad calls me Samantha.”

“I hate to tell you, but my dog’s name was Sam. I still miss him.”

Ron looked like he was going to cry, so Sam did what women did the world over when their men were about to loose it emotionally, she held him and let him cry on her shoulder. Mary saw the extended clinch, then saw Ron’s shoulders shaking, and knew what was going on, so she went back in the house. Finally when Ron stopped crying, he dried his eyes, and Sam’s beautiful face was staring into his eyes. He said “Thanks Sam” and gave her a kiss, which she enthusiastically returned. Mary came out of the house just then, and said “Lunch is ready.”, so Sam broke the clinch reluctantly, and walked hand in hand with Ron into the house.

Steve saw this and said “I see you two have made friends.” Mary thought “Better friends than you might imagine Steve.” and hoped Sam could keep her hormones in check. She knew Ron had a lot of self-control by the way he broke that first clinch when Sam grabbed him like a python and laid a major kiss on him. She knew Ron was going to need his self-control around her very passionate daughter. They sat down for lunch, and Steve said grace. Sam sat next to Ron, and looked like she would have sat in Ron’s lap if she could have. Steve decided to ignore his daughter’s behavior since Ron obviously seemed uncomfortable with her behavior in front of her parents. “I’ll let this one live” thought Steve.

## Chapter 75 - Back Home Again

After lunch, Sam dragged Ron out on the porch to “talk”. As soon as she was out of the view of her parents, she tried to hug the stuffing out of Ron and perform a Tonsillectomy on him with her tongue. She managed to dart her tongue past his teeth, when he firmly but politely pushed her away by the shoulders.

“Sam, I wasn’t kidding. Cool your Jets, I’m not going anywhere for a while.”

Sam sat back in the porch swing with a huff. Ron slid his right arm around her shoulder and said “Tell me about yourself.”

She said, “What’s to tell, I live in a boring house in the most boring state in the United States. I meet a hunk, and he’s either Gay or really not interested.”

“Sam, just because I’m not attacking you doesn’t mean I’m not interested. I happen to think you’re beautiful and one heck of a good kisser. I’m as straight as the next guy, it’s just you’re moving too fast for me. I’m going to go to the Academy, and I’m not going to let anything stand in the way. You know, I told Jim I just wanted to be your friend, and he said that if you had your way, I’d be more like a kissing cousin. I’ve got no problems kissing and holding you, but it’s got to stop there. Besides that, if I went further than that, if your Dad didn’t kill me, mine would.”

Sam turned her shoulder to kiss Ron, and this time she kept her tongue to herself, and Ron didn’t resist, but didn’t encourage her to go further either. When she got it out of her system, and realized that Ron wasn’t kidding, she came up for air.

“OK, Ron, we’ll try it your way - it’s just in all the movies I’ve seen, the first thing you do when you meet a guy is jump in bed with them. I thought that’s what you wanted.”

“Sam, that’s Hollywood. This is real life. I like you a lot, and want to be your friend, and you don’t have to throw yourself at me to make me like you. Now why don’t you tell me what you like to do? Do you like to fish or hunt?”

I like fishing, but I hate having to skin and gut caribou - that stinks.”

“I know what you mean - last year I had to skin and gut 3 caribou by myself. Do you do any recreational shooting or anything?”

“Dad won’t let me have my own gun, and he does all the shooting when we hunt.”

“OK, maybe I’ll ask him if I can teach you to shoot my .22 pistol.”

“Really, I’d love that.”

“Read any good books lately?”

“Just my textbooks, Dad won’t let me have any romance novels, said I don’t need any ideas.”

“Ever heard of Louis L’Amour?”

“Who’s that?”

“He wrote a whole bunch of westerns, and a couple of books set in different areas. One was set in Siberia, and is a survival story about an escaped POW from the US who survived for years in Siberia. You might want to read some Jack London, and other authors. They won’t give you any “ideas”, and they’re fun to read, and you can learn something from them.”

“I’ll ask my Dad about them later.”

“Shoot.”

“What’s wrong?”

“I’ve got chores to do at home, if I don’t get home before dark, my Dad’s going to be mad at me, and I might not be able to come back for a while.”

“In that case you better go.” Sam gave Ron a big wet kiss, and grabbed his butt. Ron left his hands safely around the small of her back. When she finally came up for air, Ron said, “I gotta go.” and walked into the kitchen to say goodbye to Steve and Mary.

“I’ve got to go home and get my chores done. Thanks for lunch.” They waved goodbye to Ron, who got into his plane as quickly as possible while avoiding Sam’s attempts to suck his lips off. Once he was in the plane, he breathed a sigh of relief, then realized he was breathing harder than he ever had, and his heart was racing. He looked over at Samantha, and realized why - she was a hottie. Once he got his breathing under control, he started the ignition, and performed a pre-flight check. When the engine had warmed up, and his pulse had returned to normal, he turned the plane, and taxied to the lake. By the time he had reached the end of the lake, he was concentrating on flying, and not on Sam. He quickly set the plane up to take off, and when he turned upwind, pushed the throttle to full. When the airspeed indicator indicated 85 knots, he pulled the yoke back, and was airborne. He turned for home, and slowly climbed to 1,000 feet. When he got close to home, he switched frequencies to call home, and asked his dad to open the hangar doors for him. Roy said he’d go do it now, and ended the call. Ron hoped he wasn’t in too much trouble. Ron concentrated on his flying, and made a perfect landing. When he taxied up to the hangar, he

could see his Mom, Dad and Lucky waiting for him. He parked the plane in the hangar, shut off the motor, turned off the fuel and battery switches, and closed the door. He hadn't made it 20 feet to the cabin when he heard his Mother's dreaded words "Ron Williams, where have you been - we've been worried sick about you."

"Mom, I'm really sorry, I was over at Samantha's house making a delivery, and they invited me for lunch, and I lost track of time. I'm sorry."

Ron walked up to his mom, who decided she could be mad at him later, and gave him a big hug. Roy joined in, and they both started crying. It deeply affected Ron to know how worried his parents were, and how upset they were at him for not telling them where he was.

"Mom, Dad, I'm so sorry. I didn't mean to scare you. I promise from now on if I stay over anywhere, I'll call you on the radio and tell you, so you won't worry about me."

Roy spoke up. "We called Bill, who told us of your route. We frantically called everyone on your route until Steve Morris told us you had just left half an hour ago. He also gave me the blow by blow description of your date with Samantha. He said you were a complete gentleman, but I'm still mad at you - Let's go outside and talk man to man."

Ron was still wearing his shoulder holster, and Roy put his on as well, and added a jacket since it was getting cold. Lucky was miffed since he didn't get to play with Ron, so he decided to tag along. They walked silently to the lake, Ron was dreading what his Dad wanted to say, when Lucky stopped dead in his tracks and growled. Roy and Ron both pivoted and faced the same direction Lucky was, and saw a huge bear not more than 30 yards away, and it appeared that it was about to charge. Both men drew and fired at the same time, and the bear almost flipped over backward, and landed in a heap. Keeping their guns pointed at the bear, they both quickly sidestepped to their left and right, so they could cover each other, and approached the bear. The bear was down and not moving, so Roy told Ron to stay where he was, and point his pistol at the ground in front of him, and don't cover Roy with his muzzle. Roy approached the bear from the right, and nudged it with his boot - it was deader than a doorknob. Roy relaxed, and re-holstered his gun. Seeing this, Ron holstered his gun as well. Roy walked over to Ron and said "Thank you son - I'm proud of you for backing me up and doing everything right - even a wounded bear can still kill you. About this afternoon, you know how I feel about pre-marital sex, and I think you know what would happen if you disappointed me with this girl."

"Dad, relax, I have no intentions of doing anything more than kissing Sam. She's a really good kisser, but I'm not going to let anything get in the way of my going to the Air Force Academy. I just wanted to be friends with her, but she's a 16 year-old boy-crazy girl. I think I talked some sense into her. If you want, I won't see her again."

"Ron, that's not necessary - I trust you, and will take you on your word. Please call us if you



are planning on stopping there again, and call us when you leave. All you have to say is you're at Sam's, and call us when you're wheels up on the way home, OK."

"Sure Dad, I can do that - thanks for trusting me. What do you want to do with this bear?"

"Let's skin it, and can the meat."

"Glad we shot it in the chest. 2 .44 Magnum JHP rounds to the head would have ruined the brain for brain tanning."

They walked back together to the cabin, told Anne what had happened, and Ron grabbed the cart and the harness to pull it home. Together they managed to get the bear onto the cart, and Ron slipped into the harness and lifted the cart, while Roy pushed from behind. An hour later, they made it home just as it was getting dark. Roy said it was too dark to butcher the bear tonight, so they wheeled it into the smokehouse for the night. Anne had dinner ready, and they ate quietly after Roy said grace. After dinner, Roy told Anne how they had killed the bear. When they got the bear onto the cart, they could see 2 bullet holes in the chest, and no exit wound. Judging from the location of the entry wound, it looked like both of them shot the bear in the heart/lung region, destroying the heart and shredding the lungs. Ron spent the rest of the evening studying his medical books, and got to sleep early. Bill had a habit of springing short-notice flights on him early in the morning. Bill never called, so they skinned and gutted the bear after breakfast. When they finished, Ron saw something strange, a female wolf he had never seen before, and she walked right up to Lucky like she knew him, and Lucky shared his food with her.

"I see you two haven't been introduced. Star this is Ron, Ron, this is Lucky's girlfriend Star. I think she's one of Francine and Oliver's descendants. She and Lucky have been hanging out together for the last week. It seems you're not the only one with a new girlfriend."

"Well I see Lucky is living up to his name. How old do you think she is?"

"My best guess is 12-18 months, since if she were older than that, she would already have mated, and not be interested in Lucky. Since he isn't fixed, there's a good chance they might have a litter of pups in the near future."

"Dad, I didn't know dogs and wolves could interbreed?"

"It doesn't happen very often, but genetically they're almost identical, and the offspring would be fertile, unlike a mule, which is a cross between a donkey and a horse. They can mate, but the cross is sterile.

"Cool, so does that mean we'll be raising wolf pups?"

“Probably not, Star is a wild wolf, and would prefer a den to a house. I’m not sure how Lucky will provide for them, since he’s a domestic dog, and isn’t used to hunting. Maybe Star will wise up and mate with a wild wolf.”

Ron got right to his chores, and started cutting and hauling wood. Since they were cutting further and further away from the cabin, the hauling part became a bigger and bigger job. Ron wished they had an ATV to haul stuff. He could stack 3-4 logs on the dollies, and connect it to the towing hitch of the ATV, and use horsepower instead of Ron power to pull the logs. It was like using a chainsaw instead of an axe or buck saw. “No use complaining” thought Ron. He should be glad he had a chainsaw, or this would really be a bear. He spent the rest of the day cutting, hauling, chopping, and stacking wood. He was glad when his Mom told him dinner was ready, he was about ready to drop with fatigue. Right after dinner, Bill called, he had some more hunters to be picked up in Anchorage and flown to their lodge. Bill gave him the coordinates and the name of the lake, and Ron looked it up on his topo maps. When he located the lake, he took bearings from Anchorage and his lake, then wrote those bearings down. He would be glad when Bill called and told him his GPS was in - it would make planning trips much easier. All he’d have to do is locate the spots on the Topo maps included in the package on his computer, and transfer the data to his GPS unit. He told his parents he was flying hunters first thing tomorrow, and they said they’d take care of things on this end. Ron remembered to set his watch alarm again, since he was flying direct from his house to Anchorage. This would be an easy trip, since the lodge was between Allakaket and Anchorage, and he needed to stop in Allakaket on the way home to fuel up anyway. He went to bed early, since he had to be up before 0700 to be wheels up at 0800. Lucky had already sacked out next to his bed on his bearskin rug. Ron wondered what they’d do with the new bearskin. They didn’t have any room for another one, since all the available floor space near the beds already had bearskins on them, and both beds had caribou and bear skins to put over them for those really cold Alaskan nights. He thought Samantha might want one, but he’d have to ask his dad first, then Steve. It would be a real good idea to make sure Steve was OK with it before giving Samantha such a valuable gift. He went to bed thinking of Samantha, instead of flying or the Academy for the first time in his life.

His alarm went off at 0700 the next morning, and he got dressed quickly since it was cold in there. 5 minutes later, his mom knocked on the door, and asked if he had time for breakfast. Ron knew his mom could have the stove hot in 5 minutes, and she’d need to get the stove hot to make coffee anyway, so all it would take was an extra 5 minutes to make oatmeal. Ron said “Sure Mom, I’d love some oatmeal for breakfast. Could you make me some coffee too? I’m sure Dad would like some. Anne started the fire in the stove, and put the water on for the coffee and oatmeal. Ron walked over to his Mom, who turned around and leaned down so he could reach her cheek, so he gave his mom a kiss on the cheek. Until the other day, she was the only woman he had kissed. Ron felt confused, since he loved his mom, but didn’t feel the way he felt when Sam kissed him. Taking a chance, he decided to ask his Mom.

“Mom, I don’t understand something. Until yesterday, you were the only woman I kissed, yet when I kiss Sam, my heart races and I feel different - what’s happening?”

“Ron when you kiss me on the cheek, it’s affectionate, but not sexual. When you kiss Sam, there’s an undeniable sexual component to it. You’ve gone through puberty and read all about the biological responses to sexual arousal. What you’re experiencing with Sam is sexual arousal. It’s normal, but you need to keep it under control, or you might do something you might regret later.”

“By that, I can assume you’re talking about pre-marital sex.”

“Exactly Ron. Sex is great, don’t get me wrong, but its best with a marriage partner you’ve committed the rest of your life to. Every time you have sex, or make love to someone, you give a piece of yourself away that you never get back. The reason God ordained sex between a husband and wife is that relationship is special, and a once-in-a lifetime opportunity to become one with someone else. Having sex before marriage damages God’s plan for us to mate with one person for life.”

“What about Dad, he was married to Susan before you met, and I’ve got 2 half-brothers.”

“Ron, that’s different. Your Dad was married to Susan, he had two sons with her, and he loved her even after she died of cancer. He didn’t meet me until years later. Even when we were dating, we never went any further than kissing, although I wanted to.”

“Mom. I never thought of you being sexually aggressive.”

“Lots of women are - like Samantha. You are going to need every ounce of self-control you can muster not to give in to her sexual urges.”

“I know what you mean - the other day she tried to give me a tonsillectomy with her tongue, and when I had to leave, she grabbed my butt when she kissed me goodbye.”

“Ron that was a little more information than I needed, but I appreciate your honesty. Please spare me the details next time. If you notice, neither one of us discusses the intimate details of what happens between your father and I. Some things are meant to be private.”

“Sorry Mom. You need to rescue breakfast, the water’s boiling.”

Anne walked over to the stove, added the coffee and the oatmeal to the appropriate containers, and 5 minutes later breakfast was ready. They all sat down for a quick breakfast, and when he was finished, Ron stood and got ready to leave. Anne gave him a kiss, and Roy prayed with Ron for a minute. Ron grabbed his jacket and walked quickly out the door. He rolled the hangar door up, and did a quick walk-around, then climbed into the pilot’s seat.

Once he got the engine warmed up, he taxied to the lake, and gave Bill a quick call, telling him he was en route to Anchorage, and should be there by 1100. Bill told him which gate to expect the hunters at, and signed off. Ron configured the plane for take-off, and by the time he was at the downwind end of the lake, he was ready to fly. He turned upwind, and pushed the throttle to full, and watched the airspeed indicator. He pulled back on the yoke when it read 85 knots, and climbed until he was 500 feet AGL, then turned for Anchorage and cruise climbed to 2,000 feet. He arrived at the TCA, and called the tower. Since it was early in the morning, the traffic pattern was empty, and they gave him a straight-in approach. 15 minutes later he was on the ground and taxiing to the correct gate. He saw 3 middle-aged hunters standing there with a skycap to load their baggage. He coasted to a stop, shut down the engine and got out. Someone at the lodge must have told them to expect a young pilot, because no one said anything. He introduced himself, and shook their hands, then helped the skycap load the plane. He asked if anyone wanted to ride in front, and found out one of the hunters was a private pilot, so he volunteered. Ron taxied over to the fuel depot, and filled up, then called the tower for take-off clearance. They said he was #2 for take-off on the same runway he had landed on. He set the flaps and rudder while he taxied. And when he reached the end of the runway, called the tower again, and was given immediate clearance. He replied "Rolling" and advanced the throttle to full. Halfway down the runway, his airspeed indicator said 85 knots, and he pulled back on the yoke, and held it until he was 500 feet up, then set up for a cruise climb to his assigned altitude. Once he was straight and level at altitude, the hunter in the front passenger seat complimented him. "That was one of the smoothest take-offs I'd seen in a while, you just seemed to float off the runway."

"Most of it was the plane. This DeHaviland Otter is a very forgiving plane compared to the Cessna 185 Amphibian I learned on."

"You learned on an Amphibian?"

"Not many paved runways in Alaska. This is about it - any where else, you're either landing on a private dirt strip, or on water."

"Man, compared to you I had it easy. Long asphalt runways and no altitude restrictions on approach. The lodge told us you recently got your Commercial ticket, and you never held a Private Pilot license before."

"I was studying with my Grandpa for my license when he became medically disabled and couldn't fly commercial. The FAA director in Anchorage is a friend of his, and we went a couple of weeks ago to get my license. He saw my landing, and waived the check ride. I've got dozens of water landings and takeoffs under my belt, including at least a dozen on our home lake, which is so small it's just barely big enough to safely land and take off with the Otter. Don't worry; the lake your lodge is on is big enough to land a 747 if it were an amphibian."

“Glad to know that - I’d hate to make a steep approach to a small lake, knowing you didn’t get a second chance.”

“But it’s amazing what it does for your powers of concentration.”

While they were talking shop, the hunters in back were marveling at the scenery. An hour later, Ron spotted their lake, and pointed it out to the private pilot who said “It looks awfully small from here.”

“It will get bigger as we get closer.”

Ron set the plane up for landing, noticing the slight cross-breeze, he turned the nose into the wind, and set the flaps for max. Pushing in the throttle he said “Going down.”

The plane sunk to the lake like it was floating under a parachute, and Ron made a perfect water landing, and coasted to the dock, where someone was waiting to offload the passengers and cargo. He slipped a rope around the front cleat of the pontoon, and grabbed the back one as it came close enough. Ron turned off the engine, and said “Thanks for flying Allakaket Airlines.” When they had deplaned, the private pilot turned back into the plane and said “Here you earned this” and handed him a \$100 bill. Ron stammered “Thanks” before the hunter walked onto the dock and closed the door. The dock worker closed the back door when he had unloaded their gear, and closed then locked the door, and knocked on the door to tell Ron he was good to go. He unhooked the ropes holding him to the dock, and pushed him off with a pole. When he was far enough away, Ron started the motor, and taxied to the downwind end of the lake. Turning upwind, he quickly configured the plane for takeoff, and pushed the throttle to full. Minutes later, he was almost out of sight. He turned to approach Allakaket, and called the tower when he got close. He nailed the landing, and taxied up to the fuel pumps. While he was filling up, Bill drove up.

“Well Ron, you did it again - another satisfied customer.”

“Bill, the hunter in the front was a Private Pilot, and he gave me a \$100 tip.”

“Ron, he’s a Neurosurgeon, and he can afford it. He was really impressed with your flying skills, and was talking you up to the lodge owners. He couldn’t believe someone your age could be such a good pilot.”

“Any word on the GPS system?”

“Should be here in a couple of days. You can probably pick it up in Anchorage when you drop these guys off 3 days from today.”

“That’s a lot of money to spend on a 3-day hunting trip.”

“They take a week every year and come up here and hunt. If you keep this up, you’ll be so busy flying hunters during hunting season that you’ll wish you were twins.”

When Ron finished filling his tanks, Bill said Goodbye and got in his Jeep. Ron got back in the plane, and turned it around to taxi out to the lake and take off. 2 hours later he was back home again. He called when he was about 10 minutes out, and asked his Dad to open the hangar for him. When he got home, Roy told him Samantha had called, and wanted to know when he was coming over again.

## Chapter 76 - The Date

When they got inside the cabin, Ron asked his Dad what he wanted to do with the bearskin. "I haven't thought that far ahead yet Ron."

"Dad, is it ok if I give it to Samantha? I noticed they didn't have any rugs in their house. Maybe they're in an area that doesn't have a lot of bears?"

"Ok, Ron, just make sure it's OK with her Dad."

"Thanks Dad. Ok, guess what, one of the hunters I flew to their lodge was a private pilot and a neurosurgeon, and he gave me a \$100 tip, and when I landed in Allakaket, Bill told me that he couldn't stop talking about what a great pilot I was. Bill said that if that kept up, I'd be so busy during hunting season that I would wish I were twins."

"That's great Ron, just don't let it go to your head, and please be careful, because it can all end in an eye blink. Ron Fellows was a good pilot, and one little mistake cost his life, and almost mine."

"I know Dad, I'm very careful."

"You know Son, every time you get in that airplane, I don't know if you're coming back, so I just put it in God's hands."

"Dad, he'll take care of me either way. Don't worry about me."

Roy gave his son a big hug, then turned to go work in the garden with Anne.

When they left, Ron took that opportunity to call Samantha's house. She was surprised when he asked to talk to her Dad.

"Hi, this is Ron Williams. Steve, I need to ask you a question and a favor."

"Go ahead."

"Ok, first of all, I feel funny calling you by your first name - can I call you by your last name?"

"I'd appreciate that Ron. My last name is Stone."

"Thank you Mr. Stone. OK, here goes. We shot a bear the other day that was attacking us, and we already have more bearskins than we can use. I wanted to give it to Samantha since

we can't legally sell them. I noticed you didn't have any bearskin rugs, and assumed you didn't have any bears around there."

"Ron, you're right, I've never seen a bear around here in the 20 years I've lived here. I think giving us the skin is a nice gesture, and I'm assuming there are no strings attached."

"No sir, I just wanted to give it to Samantha - we're just friends remember?"

"Ok, anything else?"

"I asked Samantha if she'd like to learn to shoot my .22 pistol, and I told her I had to ask your permission first, besides it would give us something else to do when I was there."

Steve was quick on the uptake, and realized if Samantha was holding a pistol, she couldn't be squeezing Ron's butt.

"OK Ron, I think that's a good idea. Samantha also likes fishing too."

"Great, can I talk to Samantha now, Mr. Stone?"

"Hi Ron. I wondered what was taking so long."

"I just had to get your Dad's permission to teach you to shoot my .22 pistol. I need to check with Bill and see what my flying schedule will be in the next couple of days. Can I call you right back?"

"Don't keep me waiting - Bye Sweetie."

Ron called Bill next "Bill, its Ron, what's my schedule like for the next couple of days?"

"As far as I know, all you have is the return trip from the lodge you dropped off today in 3 days. Why, you got a hot date?"

"Not Funny Bill."

"Sorry Ron, just kidding - your schedule is wide open for the next couple of days. If anything changes, I'll call you."

"OK, if you need me tomorrow, talk to my Dad, he'll know where to reach me. If it's an emergency, he can get hold of me."

"Ok Ron, Have fun."



Ron shook his head - you had no privacy with 2 -way radios. It was worse than living in a small town, everyone knew your business.

He called Samantha “Sam, I’ll be over at 0900 tomorrow, OK?”

“I can’t wait - see you later.”

Ron was glad she didn’t call him Sweetie over the radio again, maybe her father was sitting there.

Ron asked his Dad if he could take a brick of CCI Min-mags over to Samantha’s tomorrow. Roy said it was OK with him. Ron went and checked on the Bearskin. It had already been brain-tanned and washed, and was almost dry. By tomorrow morning, it would be perfect. The only flaw with the skin was the 2 bullet holes in the middle of the skin. Ron hoped Samantha would like it. He remembered Samantha probably didn’t have eye protection either, and asked Anne if he could borrow hers. She said OK, and Ron added them to the pile of stuff he was going to bring over to Sam’s. When he finished, he got on his safety gear, and went to cut some more wood. He spent the rest of the day cutting, hauling and splitting wood, and stacking the stuff he split the other day. In a couple of weeks, they needed to hunt caribou to replace their meat supply. Since Roy wasn’t eating as much red meat now, they should be able to get by with 2 caribou instead of 3. Ron was glad, since that 3<sup>rd</sup> caribou made it tough to haul it all home. When Anne called him in for dinner, he was more than ready to call it quits. After dinner, he took a bath and started studying his books were he had left off. He remembered he needed targets to shoot at, and they had a bunch of old coffee cans they weren’t using for anything, since all their bear grease was in jars. He asked his Mom if he could take several of them. She said to go ahead and take all of them, they were just taking up room, so he added them to the collection. When he finished studying, he went to bed so he could be up bright and early.

The next morning, he was up at 0700, and Anne made them breakfast. After kissing his Mom goodbye, and his Dad praying over him, Ron grabbed all the stuff he was going to bring to Samantha’s house, and put it in the plane, then took the bearskin off the smokehouse roof. It was totally dry, so he rolled it up, and tied it with a piece of red ribbon his Mom gave him. He put it on top of all the other stuff, made sure he had everything, then did a walk-around and satisfied the plane was in perfect working order, got inside and started the motor. Once it had warmed up, he taxied out to the lake, and started configuring it for takeoff. When he reached the downwind end of the lake, he turned into the wind, and gunned the throttle, and was soon airborne. He turned to head to Samantha’s place, and was landing on their lake at 0850. He taxied right up to their cabin, and Samantha was waiting for him. This time she let him all the way out of the aircraft before she hugged the stuffing out of him and gave him a big wet kiss. When she finally came up for air, he said “I’ve got something for you Samantha” and walked around to the passenger side to get the bearskin out of the plane. She was surprised to see him carrying a huge skin.

“What is that?”

“It’s a bearskin. My Dad and I were walking to the lake the other day, when Lucky my dog started growling. We turned and there was this big bear not more than 30 yards away, it stood on its hind legs, and growled like it was going to charge. Since it was so close, we couldn’t take any chances, so my Dad and I drew and shot at the same time. Both of our .44 Magnum rounds struck him at the same time and almost knocked him off his feet backwards. We skinned and gutted it, and my Mom canned the meat for later. We have more bearskins that we know what to do with, so I thought I’d give this to you. I called your Dad yesterday to ask his permission to give it to you, and to teach you how to shoot my .22 pistol.”

“Thanks Ron, that was sweet.” Sam took the opportunity to give Ron another kiss, but since her hands were full, she was frustrated when he quickly broke off the kiss. When she turned around, she understood why - her Dad was standing on the porch. She carried the skin up to her Dad. “Look what Ron gave me.” she crowed to her Dad like he had given her a huge diamond ring.

She carried it inside, and unrolled it. When it was fully unrolled, Steve whistled. This was the biggest bearskin he had ever seen.

“That’s a mighty big bear Ron.”

“Mr. Stone, that’s one of the smallest ones we’ve shot around our place.”

“Now I see why you’re armed to the teeth. If that’s the smallest bear you’ve shot, you’ve got some really big bears around your land.”

“You should have seen the one my Dad killed 16 years ago. It was almost twice as big as that one.”

“Wow - glad we decided to homestead here; we looked at HelpmeJack Lake, and thought the lake was too small to land an airplane.”

“You’re almost right, I can just land safely with the DeHaviland, but the Cessna 185 thinks it’s landing at JFK.”

Steve laughed at that description, then realized that Ron had been landing the DeHaviland there almost since he was a student pilot, he must have nerves of steel.

“Mr. Stone, is there a good place I can set up so Samantha can shoot my .22 pistol? If you and your wife want to come along, you’re more than welcome.” Samantha nudged him in the ribs - she wanted some time alone with Ron.

Steve took him up on the offer, and they walked outside. Ron got the ammo and the coffee cans. Steve showed him where he thought it was safest to set up. Ron set up the coffee cans on stumps and on the ground at various distances from 15 feet to 15 yards. When he set up, he put on his shooting glasses, and handed Samantha a set. Steve produced 2 sets of shooting glasses, and handed one to Mary. He was about to put earmuffs on when Ron said “You won’t need those - this is a suppressed .22”

“How’d you get a suppressed .22 in Alaska?”

“I think it was something like low friends in High places. My Mom and Dad have one too.”

Steve shrugged his shoulders, and removed his earplugs. Ron unloaded his .22/45 and walked over to Samantha, and showed her how to hold, and aim the pistol. She was enjoying the attention and Ron’s inadvertent body contact. When she felt confident holding and aiming the pistol, and after he had given her a serious safety lecture, he had her dry fire until she had it down, then handed her a magazine, and had her load the gun. He stood right behind her where he could see where she was aiming at. It hit her all of a sudden that she really was firing a live gun, and she settled down and took something seriously for once. She followed Ron’s advice literally, and she blew her first round right through the center of the coffee can 15 feet away. She kept shooting at it, and all of the rounds hit the can. He handed her the 2<sup>nd</sup> magazine, and told her to aim at the coffee can 15 yards away on a tree stump. She missed her first two rounds, then Ron whispered “Steady Down, Sam, control your breathing, and line up the dot with the center of the can, and squeeze the trigger.” She settled down, and the next 5 rounds went right through the center of the can. She got excited, and the rest of the magazine hit the can, but her group looked like someone had shot it with a shotgun at 25 yards. When the gun locked empty, Ron asked Steve if he wanted to try it. Samantha handed Ron the pistol correctly, and Ron gave Steve the same safety and operating instructions as Sam. While he dry fired, Ron loaded 2 magazines for Steve, and handed the magazines to Steve. He loaded the gun, cycled the action, and aimed at another can 15 yards away. His first round went right through the center of the can, and he kept squeezing off a round a second until the magazine was empty. When he finished shooting the second magazine, Ron could see by his grin that he enjoyed shooting the .22. Ron asked him if he was in the Military. He said he was a Navy Corpsman in Desert Storm 1. Steve asked Ron what brought that up, and Ron told him he shot exactly like his uncle Steve. Steve knew that Steve Fellows was a Colonel in the Air Force, and went through 3 tours of duty as a Pararescue Jumper before he became the CO of the SAR command at MacDill AFB. Steve was kind of a celebrity in Allakaket, and he had followed Steve’s career through the local news. Steve handed Ron back his weapon, and Ron asked if Mary wanted to try. She grinned, since she saw how much fun Steve had. Ron suggested Steve talk Mary through the process, since he didn’t want to touch another man’s wife. Steve thought that was a good idea, since he had noticed Ron accidentally bumped into Samantha’s chest a couple of times while showing her the grip and stance, and correcting her body position. Steve took the pistol back, and Ron loaded the 2 magazines again while Steve showed his

wife how to shoot the pistol. Mary was thrilled, since Steve had never taught her to shoot before, and she always wanted to learn. Mary didn't complain, since Steve was definitely Old Fashioned when it came to "Me Tarzan, You Jane" stuff like shooting the food and protecting them. Since his only experience at shooting had either been self-defense shooting in the Navy, or hunting, he didn't realize that there was a recreational part to shooting as well, and his wife and daughter could enjoy something they could do together. Steve gave Mary the safety drill, showed her how to operate the pistol, how to stand, hold the pistol, and how to shoot. Steve was glad that Ron had suggested that Steve teach his wife how to shoot, since he bumped into his wife a couple of times as well. She just grinned and didn't say anything, but Steve knew that he was in for a long night. She dry fired a dozen times, then he handed her a magazine. She loaded the pistol exactly as Steve had told her, and cycled a round into the chamber. She controlled her breathing, and squeezed the trigger when the dot was right over the center of the can. She was rewarded by a bullseye, and she kept shooting just like Steve did. When the gun locked open, she had a big grin on her face too. Steve handed her the other magazine, and she aimed at a can 15 yards away. She put 10 rounds into it, but that was great for a first time. She handed the empty gun to Steve, then gave him a big hug and whispered "Thanks Steve, I wanted to do that for years." When she broke the clinch, he asked Ron to hold up a minute, he wanted to get his .45. Ron asked if he had some spare earplugs, since he didn't bring any. Steve came back with his Colt Officers model, a box of .45 acp practice ammo and a box of earplugs. He handed 2 to everyone, then unloaded the defensive JHP ammo from both magazines, and reloaded with practice ammo. Ron stuck his earplugs in, then showed Samantha how to put hers in. Steve checked that Mary had her earplugs in, then walked to the group of cans, and moved one back so it was 25 yards away, then walked back to the firing line. Ron nodded that they were good to go, and Steve stuck his gun in his holster, then drew it and shot 7 rounds right in the center of the 25 yard can. When he finished shooting, Ron told Steve that he was a good shot with that .45. He asked if Steve wanted to show Sam and Mary how to shoot it. He turned around and Mary was nodding her head vigorously, so Steve gave in, and motioned her up next to him. He explained that this gun will kick more than the .22 but she should be able to control it easily. He explained how the gun worked, and handed her a loaded mag after she dry fired a couple of times. She cycled the action, and set the safety, then held it at "low ready" until Steve was ready for her to shoot. When he was ready, he nodded, and she swept the safety down with her thumb, raised the barrel until it was pointing right at the target, and slipped her finger onto the trigger. As soon as the sights steadied on the target, she gently squeezed the trigger, and the gun roared and the first round struck the center of the target. Mary emptied the rest of the magazine right into the center of the target just like Steve had told her. Steve hoped he could get a good deal on another .45 because he could see his wife was hooked. When she was finished, Samantha said she would stick with the .22 for now. Mary gave Steve another hug, and he hoped that he would survive the night. He loaded the gun, and asked Ron if he wanted to fire it. Steve gave Ron the same lecture Ron gave Steve earlier, and showed him how the gun worked. After he dry fired a few times to get a feel for the trigger, Ron inserted a mag, cycled the action, and left the gun pointing in low ready. He looked at Steve, who nodded that everything was OK, and looked back at the targets,

selected one of the 15-yard ones that hadn't been shredded yet, and pulled the gun up out of low ready, and as soon as the sights steadied on the center of the can, he squeezed the trigger. The recoil was much less than he thought, and the first round drilled right through the center of the can. He quickly emptied the rest of the mag, and dropped the empty mag and left the slide locked back. He looked into the chamber to make sure the gun was empty, and handed it back to Steve barrel down, then handed him the empty mag.

"Thanks Steve, that was fun. The next time I come over, I'll bring some practice ammo for the .44 Magnum so you can shoot it."

"I'd appreciate it, I always wanted a hand cannon, but never got an opportunity to fire one." Steve took his earplugs out, and everyone else did too. Ron reloaded the .22 mags and noticed that one of the far cans didn't have any holes in it. He asked Steve if it were OK to shoot the .22. "Sure, it's your gun."

Ron made sure everyone was safely behind him, then loaded the gun and cycled the action. He raised the barrel, and as soon as the red dot covered the center of the can, he quickly squeezed off 15 shots. Steve stood there amazed, the entire group could be covered by a 50 cent piece. Steve realized Ron was shooting a gun with what amounted to a target barrel, no recoil, and no muzzle blast, that had probably been accurized on top of it. But still Ron's group was considerably smaller than his, and he shot it twice as fast. Steve remembered that it was Ron's gun, and he probably shot it hundreds or thousands of times to get that good. Mary said that she would have lunch ready in half an hour, and went in to make lunch. Steve thanked Ron for letting him shoot his gun, and went in to help his wife. Samantha finally had Ron alone to herself, but wasn't trying anything. Ron reloaded the pistol and handed it to her, and they spent the rest of the half hour taking turns shooting. When she finished, Sam gave Ron a big kiss, and said "Thanks" but didn't try to remove his tonsils or grab his butt. Ron hoped Sam had cooled down a little. Mary called them for lunch, and they walked hand in hand to the cabin, but this time Sam behaved herself, and didn't try to sit in Ron's lap. Steve noted approvingly, but didn't say anything. For all he knew, Sam might just be biding her time to attack him at a more opportune moment. After lunch, Sam suggested the Ron and her go fishing. Ron thought that would be a good idea, since he could actually talk to her. They grabbed the fishing gear, and Samantha took Ron's hand as they walked to the lake.

"Sam what gives, you haven't tried to attack me for over an hour?"

"Nothing personal Ron, it's just shooting those guns brought me down to reality. I was living an illusion, that If I looked and acted like those girls I saw on the movies, I could move to Hollywood and be a big star. Until I met you the only thing I wanted was out of here. Sorry about grabbing your butt yesterday, I was still living the fantasy. When we started shooting, I realized we live in a dangerous area, and I had better know how to defend myself, and survive if anything should happen. From what my Dad told me, your father is

kind of a celebrity around Allakaket for having survived out here a year by himself with nothing more than a knife, hatchet and a black powder rifle, then building a canoe and paddling down that river. I hope he had the chance to teach you some survival stuff, because I want to learn. I want to be your friend, not your lover, but I'll still want to kiss you from time to time."

"Sam, don't worry about grabbing my butt. Yesterday was one of the first days I went to bed thinking about something besides flying and the Air Force Academy. I really like you a lot, but I'm not going to do anything to mess up my chances to go to the Academy. Also, I really like the way you kiss. Thanks to my Mom and Dad, I know a lot about survival, and if you want to, I'll teach you everything I know."

When they got to the lake, Sam dropped her pole and the tackle box, and laid a very passionate kiss on Ron. When she finally stopped, he said, "this might sound like a stupid question, but what was that for?"

"Just because you're so sweet, you say the nicest things. I was afraid you'd be hurt that I didn't want to get physical with you."

"Hurt, I'm relieved - fighting you off is like wrestling with a python."

Sam gave him another kiss, and behaved herself. Ron helped her tie a lure onto her line, then tied one on his line. He let her cast first, then threw his lure way out on the lake, reeled in a few cranks, and sat down to wait. Seeing the fanny pack on his waist, she asked "What's That?"

Ron hoped his fly wasn't open, then realized she was pointing at his fanny pack. He handed her the rod, and took it off. He showed her the knives, and explained their use, then he started going through the bag, one item at a time. He took out the magnesium firestarter, the Bic lighter, and the BSA hot match and PJ saturated cotton balls. She asked why he had so much firestarting stuff.

"Sam, you always need 3 means to start fire. Fire is your most important survival tool. If you can make fire, you've got a way to stay warm, boil water in case you don't have any means of purifying water, it acts as a signal, and can keep some animals at bay. And when you're through doing all that, it can cook food. Trust me, broiled meat is much better than raw."

"Ew Gross."

"Sam, if you had to eat raw meat to survive, you do what you have to. Let's say you're in the jungle, being chased by the Vietcong, and if you start a fire, they'll find you torture and kill you. You haven't eaten for 48 hours, and you find a tree full of grubs. Trust me, you'll

eat them if you want to survive.”

“Ron, the probability of me being lost in Vietnam is about the same as me winning Miss America.”

“OK, let’s make it closer to home. You’re flying with me. I crash, and I’m killed in the accident, and you’re injured. The plane is a wreck, you can’t use the radio or anything to get help. It’s been 72 hours since you’ve eaten, and there’s a bunch of bugs roaming around, but you can’t get far enough away from the plane to start a fire without risking a gasoline fire. Now what?”

“Ron, you are so morbid.”

“Sam - It could happen. How do you think I got here. Ron Fellows was flying my dad to a caribou hunt when he crashed 100 miles off course. Ron was killed in the accident, and the only things my Dad had was what was in his fanny pack. He survived for a year by using what he had, finding more, and being very creative.”

“OK Ron, you’re right. I guess I’m still living in Fantasyland.”

“Nope you’re in Alaska, but you’ve led a sheltered life with a very protective father. By not letting you learn to fend for yourself, he’s not doing you any favors. What if he had been killed or injured in a hunting accident miles from home - would you and your Mom know how to survive out here. You can’t live year round on fish.”

“Ok...Ok. You’ve made your point. Tell me some more about the stuff in your bag.”

“Some of the stuff is first aid stuff that you need basic first aid training to use.”

“What’s this film can for?”

“That’s a mini fishing kit. My Dad used one for over a year to catch fish until he got a real rod and reel. The line is wound around the can, and the lures go inside. You tie a lure onto the line, unravel about what you want to cast, and take about 3 feet from the lure in your hand, holding on carefully to the can, and spin the lure, and launch it when it’s on its way up on the loop, by letting go with the hand you’re spinning the lure with. If you coiled the line properly, the lure will shoot out into the lake, pulling the line behind it smoothly. You pull the line in with one hand, and wind it around the can after you land the fish.”

“Cool, I didn’t know you could make a fishing kit so small. What’s in the other can?”

“That’s Petroleum jelly saturated cotton balls. You use 100% natural cotton balls, and slowly add petroleum jelly to it, until it’s saturated, then pack it into the film can. All you do

is pull off a small piece about the size of a dime, and stretch it until it's the size of a quarter. You lay it on top of your tinder - that's the smallest twigs you can find, and take either the striker rod of your magnesium firestarter or the flint rod from the Hot Match, and strike it with a knife blade to start a fire. Then you slowly add bigger and bigger wood to form a teepee over it." Ron saw some rocks that someone had formed into a ring, and gathered some small wood and tinder. "Here, I'll show you."

Ron opened his film can full of PJ saturated cotton balls, pulled a dime-size piece off it, and pulled it until it was the size of a quarter. He laid it on top of some twigs, and taking the striker and rod from the hot match, struck a spark and threw it into the PJ, and it burst into flames. He added twigs to it until they had a small fire going. Ron didn't want to waste wood for a demonstration, so he didn't add anything bigger. He turned to Sam "That's how you start a fire. If you wanted to keep it going, you would slowly add larger and larger pieces of wood. I don't want to waste wood, so I didn't add anything thicker than a twig, but you get the idea."

"That was so hot Ron."

"And that was the worst pun I've heard all week."

"Sorry Ron, I wasn't trying to be Punny."

<Major Groan from Ron> "One more like that, and I'm picking up my toys and going home."

"Not yet, you still have half your pack to show me."

"Ok, this wire is multi-use. You can make a primitive snare with it to catch a rabbit or squirrel, or you can use it to build something."

"Ron, I've got a lot to get used to - I can't see killing a cute bunny for food."

"If you don't have a gun, what are you going to use for fresh meat, you can't eat fish year round around here because the lakes freeze in winter. Besides, you can make stuff out of their pelts like slippers and clothing. My Dad survived most of the first winter on what he could shoot with a primitive black powder rifle, and what he could catch with snares."

"Like I said, I've got a lot to get used to. What's that trash bag for?"

"It can be used as a poncho, sleeping bag, or a primitive shelter. You cut arm and neck holes in it for a poncho, slip it over your legs and fill it full of pine tree boughs for a sleeping bag, or cut it open along one side and use it to make a primitive lean-to."



“How do you do that?”

“I don’t want to cut this bag open to show you, so I’ll tell you. I’ve got a Swiss Army Knife with scissors in my pack. If you open the bag all the way up, it has a side seam. Cut that side seam with the scissors, then cut open the bottom seam of the bag. Spread it out, and hold one end down with rocks, dirt, or something, then stick a stick under the opposite corner, and tie a string to that corner and tie a stick to the string and bury it, or make a primitive tent stake, and pound it in. Between the stick and the string, it holds the front corner up, and forms a lean-to.”

“OK, I’ve got it. Ron, I think you have a fish on the line.”

Ron grabbed his pole and started reeling it in. Sure enough, he had a big lake trout on the line. A couple of minutes later, Sam had one too. Ron took his Gerber tool, removed the hook from the fish, and threaded it onto the stringer. A couple of minutes later, Sam beached her fish too. Ron did the gallant thing and got the fish off the hook, and put it on the stringer.

“I think that’s enough for dinner. Let’s head back.”

Ron turned around, and taking his canteen cup, took some lake water and put the fire out, then repacked his fanny pack, and put it back on. Sam picked up the fishing tackle, and he carried the stringer of fish back to their house. When they got back to their cabin, Ron handed the fish to Steve, and Sam said “We caught dinner. Ron showed me how to use some of the stuff in his fanny pack - you should see some of this stuff Dad, Ron told me his Dad spent a year out here, and survived with what he had on his fanny pack, what he found, and anything he could make with it. Ron showed me how to build a fire. It was so cool.”

“Mr. Stone, I made sure the fire was out, I drowned it with lake water, and stirred it.”

“Thanks Ron, I’m glad you were so thorough about putting out that fire. You know, the only survival information I got was from the US Navy, and almost none of it applies to surviving here.”

“If you want, instead of just showing Sam, I’d be more than happy to show all of you. These Fanny packs are cheap, and they contain enough stuff to survive. You might not be comfortable, but you’ll be alive.”

“Thanks Ron, I appreciate it. Almost forgot, your Dad just called. You might want to call him.”

“Thanks Mr. Stone - I’ll run out to the plane and use the radio.”

Ron took off like a shot, He was hoping it wasn't an emergency. He opened the cabin door, turned on the battery, and turned on the radio, then switched frequencies to his home frequency.

"Ron calling Roy, Dad, what's Up?"

"Hi Ron. I thought you might be heading home by now, and thought you might have forgotten. Mr. Stone told me you and Sam were out fishing."

"Dad, we just got back - Is there an emergency or anything?"

"Nope, just thought you would be home by now."

"Do you want me to come home now, I was just talking with Sam's family about Survival and Preparedness."

"No Son, stay as long as you want, just be home before dark."

"OK Dad, see you in a couple of hours."

Ron turned the radio off, and the battery, then closed the door and walked back to Sam's house.

"Sorry about that, my Dad just thought I'd be home by now."

"It's OK - Ron how much would it cost to build 3 of those kits?"

"Mr. Stone, if you want to pay me for the parts, I can buy them the next time I'm in Anchorage and put them together for you. It would save you about half the cost. I'd estimate about \$50 per kit if you don't have the Swiss Army knives, since they are almost \$20 each."

"Ok, Ron, if you could build 3 of them, I'll pay you for the parts."

"Great Mr. Stone."

"Ron, it will be dark in a little over 2 hours, you need to get going."

"OK, thanks for having me. I'll see you in about a week - I have to fly some hunters the rest of the week."

"Dad, I'll walk Ron to the plane."

Sam helped Ron into all his gear, and made sure he had everything. They walked hand in

hand to the plane. “Sam I had a great time today. I’d like to see you as soon as I get a day off.”

“Ron, I’d like that very much - Thanks for everything.”

When they got to the plane, Sam realized she was out of sight of her Dad, and hugged Ron tight, grabbed him by the butt, and laid a seriously passionate kiss on him. Ron couldn’t help himself, and found his hands running up and down her back, but staying in “safe” areas just in case her Dad could see them. Ron started to get a little too excited, so he pushed her away very gently. “Sam, I can’t. Much as I’d like to, if I keep this up, I won’t be able to stop.”

Sam gave him a quick kiss on the lips “Me either. You’re a pretty good kisser too.”

Ron found enough strength and willpower to climb into the pilot’s seat, and waited until Sam was back on the porch, then started the motor, and while it was warming up, did his preflight checks. Finally, he waved goodbye, and Sam blew him a kiss from the porch. Ron turned the plane around and taxied toward the lake. He really had to fight to concentrate on his flying. Finally, he started reciting the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm. He had the plane configured and his pulse under control by the time he reached the end of the lake. He turned upwind, and pushed the throttle to the max, and was soon flying. He called his Dad as soon as he was airborne, and said he was on his way home.

## Chapter 77 - The Hunters Pt. 2

Ron flew home, and was able to concentrate well enough to make a good landing, it wasn't his best, but he had just got his motor seriously revved by Sam. He taxied up to the hangar, saw the doors were open, so he taxied on in. When he shut down, he walked outside, and there stood his Mom and Dad just like a Norman Rockwell painting. Lucky decided if he wanted to say Hi, he'd have to get to Ron first, and charged off the porch. Lucky wasn't a small dog anymore, and hit Ron like a freight train, and managed to knock Ron over and lick his entire face, destroying any evidence of anything that Anne might have gotten upset over. Ron finally managed to get Lucky off him, and walked up to his Mom and Dad, and gave them both a big hug. They went inside the house, and Ron sat down, more tired than he realized. He got up and poured several large glasses of water, then asked his Mom and Dad if they wanted any. They didn't so he sat back down to relax.

Anne asked him, "How'd it go son?"

"Great, Samantha loved the bearskin, and we all got to go shooting. Samantha and her Mom actually enjoyed the shooting, now Mr. Stone is thinking about buying Mary a Colt Officer's model like his. Sam seems content to shoot my .22, but I promised Mr. Stone that he could shoot my .44 magnum next time I'm over there, so I have to remember to bring some practice ammo. He let me shoot his .45. It was much easier to shoot than the .44 magnum, and his sights were pretty good too. Samantha finally cooled her jets and stopped trying to attack me. I hope she settles down, and just acts like my friend. After lunch, we went fishing, and I showed Samantha the gear in my fanny pack, and how to start a fire with it. Samantha was gushing to her Dad about my kit, and he said he wants me to make 3 more kits for them, and he'll pay me for the parts."

"That's great Ron - I'm glad you made some new friends. So when do we get to meet her?"

"It will be a while Mom, I barely know the girl, and her parents don't know me well enough to go off flying somewhere with their daughter."

Roy laughed and said "You've got a point there."

Without any warning the radio came on. "Ron, It's Bill - you there?"

"Go Ahead Bill."

"Those hunters are ready to go home tomorrow morning, and your GPS has shown up. I've got a load of groceries for Allakaket. If you could bring those back with you, I'll pay you for the gas, and have the mechanic install the GPS for you tomorrow afternoon."

“Bill, I promised Mr. Stone I’d build him 3 fanny packs - I need to do some shopping in Anchorage while I’m there.”

“What do you need, I’ve got good connections, if I call them now with the list, they could add it to my shipment, and save you all the running around.”

OK, Bill - here goes.” (Ron opened his fanny pack, and listed the contents) “I need 3 times the quantities I gave you since I’m making 3 kits. Can you order the bags in a subdued color?”

“Ron, I’m pretty sure I can have that list for you tomorrow. I’ll just charge you 10% over my cost, which would still be cheaper than buying it yourself.”

“Thanks, Bill - I need a receipt since Mr. Stone is paying me for the supplies.”

“No Problem - just make sure you’re at the lodge at 0800 tomorrow.”

“OK, see you tomorrow afternoon.”

Ron turned off the radio, and charged the battery. He put it back on Standby when he was finished.

Anne had started dinner while Ron was on the Radio. Roy was sitting in his chair. “Ron, that was a nice gesture offering to make them 3 kits. I think I have a few items around here that are extra that I wished I had years ago.”

“Thanks, Dad, I’m sure they’ll appreciate it.”

Anne announced that dinner was ready, and Ron washed his hands and they sat down to eat. After Roy said grace, they all dug in. Roy and Anne didn’t eat much anymore, but Ron was very hungry, and had 2 huge helpings of everything.

After dinner, Roy and Anne read their Bibles, and Ron had his nose in another Medical Book. Anne was amazed at how fast Ron absorbed the highly technical information. She thought that if he were interested in Medicine, he had the mental abilities that a good medical student needed, and he already passed his APT for mathematics, which included first year Calculus. Later that evening, he put the books down and took a quick bath and got ready for bed. Lucky had already sacked out on his bearskin rug, and Ron crawled into bed since he had to get up early tomorrow.

At 0630 the next morning, his alarm went off, and he got dressed, then ate breakfast, and was warming up the plane by 0710. By 0715 he was airborne, and made it to the lodge at 0759. The hunters were waiting, and the dock worker helped them load up and then shoved

Ron off so he could safely start the plane. The Neurosurgeon was riding in the front seat again, and Ron decided to talk to him this time. When he was airborne and headed for Anchorage, he turned toward the Neurosurgeon, and introduced himself. “I’m Ron Williams. Bill told me you are a neurosurgeon and a Private Pilot, but he failed to tell me your name.”

“I normally go by Doctor Richards, but you can call me Doc.”

“Thanks Doc. I take it you’ve been flying for a while.”

“I’ve been a private pilot for 20 years, and a Neurosurgeon for 30.”

“Which one’s harder?”

“They both require a lot of concentration, but I have more fun flying.”

“My Mom’s making me study her medical books, she wants me to have the equivalent knowledge of an EMT II or a Paramedic.”

“How Come?”

“Out here, there’s just one doctor, and I can get called to an emergency and need to stabilize a sick or wounded patient before I can fly them to the doctor’s clinic in Allakaket.” The nearest Hospital is in Anchorage, and that’s 2 hours by air.”

“Wow, I didn’t realize it was that remote. What books are you reading?”

“I started on the Merck Manual, and I’m working my way through Gray’s Anatomy, and she has some older books from when she was studying for her RN.”

“You’re Mom’s an RN?”

“She’s licensed in Texas and Alaska, but she hasn’t taken any CU courses in years.”

“Ron, if you’ve got the time, I have a couple of good books you can borrow, they’re about Wilderness Medicine. That’s a sub-specialty that is really needed out here.”

“I know, before my Uncle Steve, excuse me Dr. Fellows left Alaska to become a Pararescue Jumper, he ordered a complete Paramedic kit for her including all the drugs, since the MD that was replacing him in town was just a GP with no Emergency Medicine training. Steve did 4 years in the ER in Dallas Texas.”

“How long ago was that?”

“Let’s see, I’m almost 15, and they had it when I was born, so most of the stuff is 15 years old.”

“You know most of the drugs are expired. Have your mom contact my nurse at this number, and I’ll fill any prescriptions she feels she needs, and I’ll ship some books to you.”

“Thanks Doc, I really appreciate it. If you want to send anything to us, you need to send it to General Delivery, Allakaket Alaska - I don’t know the zip code, and put Attention Ron Williams for me, or Anne Williams for my mom.”

“You know Ron, you remind me a lot of me at your age, your whole life ahead of you, and you seem way more mature than I was at your age. I know I could have never have gotten a Commercial License at 14.”

“Doc, I didn’t have a lot of choice. My Grandpa Jim was the commercial pilot in Allakaket until Arteriosclerosis forced his early retirement. He can’t fly commercial since he could stroke out at any moment. And the drugs he’s taking are making it hard to do anything.”

“Ron, there are some new drugs for Arteriosclerosis that Jim’s Doctor might not be aware of with less side effects. Here’s my card, ask Jim’s doctor to call me next week.”

“Thanks Doc. Too bad this isn’t a dual control plane, or I’d let you take the stick.”

I’d like that, I don’t get enough stick time anymore. When I fly, I’m the passenger, and in a hurry.”

“Why are you in a hurry Doc?”

“In my specialty, I can be needed anywhere in the US for neurosurgery. You see, I handle mostly the difficult cases, or the ones other doctors won’t touch because of those damn malpractice lawyers. You can do everything right, and still lose a patient, and then some shyster has the audacity to sue you for doing your job, because he thinks he could make a buck. Problem is the insurance companies usually settle, and the lawyers know this, and whenever a difficult patient goes bad, they circle like buzzards fighting over the scraps. If it weren’t for the lawyers, Medicine would be a lot more fun. Now most of the tests you run are just CYA in case some lawyer sues you. Any idea what you want to do?”

“I’m going to the Air Force Academy when I’m 17 and a half. I want to be a Strike Eagle pilot.”

“You sound pretty sure of yourself.”

My Uncle Steve - the doctor, is a Colonel in the Air Force in charge of the Search and

Rescue wing at MacDill AFB. His General gave me a copy of a letter he wrote to my State Senator requesting an appointment to the Academy as soon as I'm old enough."

"Well, I guess that settles that."

"Pretty much. I'd really have to do something pretty stupid to blow it, and if I did, Steve would kill me, and my Dad would kill anything left."

Ron and the Doc both laughed at that. Ron noticed they were on the fringe of the Anchorage Control area, so he called Anchorage. Ron was amazed when they gave him a straight in routing, he never had to circle. He wondered if they didn't have his tail number on a hot sheet, and were giving him preferential treatment. Not one to look a gift horse in the mouth, Ron acknowledged the call, and started his descent. As he got closer, he cranked the flaps out, and lowered the landing gear. Once he was over the landing threshold, he cut the throttle to idle, and they floated down to the runway. Ron remembered to flatten his flare right before he landed, since he was landing on wheels. Once the wheels were solidly on the runway, he lowered the nose until the nose wheel made contact, then released the back pressure on the yoke. The plane rolled the rest of the runway, and Ron turned toward the correct gate, and when he saw the ground crew, followed their directions, and parked right on the mark. He shut down and got out. When Doc got out of the plane, he shook Ron's hand, and when Ron opened his hand, it contained 2 of his cards and a check. He didn't look at the check, but thanked Doc. "Make sure you call my nurse, and have Jim's doctor call me or my nurse. Thanks for the flight, I really enjoyed myself. I'll see you next year when I come out."

Ron helped unload the plane, then said goodbye to everyone, and got back into the plane. He taxied up to the fuel pumps, and couldn't stand the suspense anymore, and unfolded the check. There was a post-it note attached, and writing on the front and back.

Ron:

Thanks for a very enjoyable flight. You reminded me of my love of flying. I used to dread coming to Alaska, because the pilots were either drunks or egomaniacs. Flying with a young professional such as yourself who so enjoys flying reminded me why I got my license in the first place. Put this money toward your education, or buy something nice.

Sincerely,

Doc Richardson

When he unfolded the check, it was for \$1,000.00 Ron almost fainted. He wished he would have opened the note sooner so he could thank the doctor personally. Even the note without the money would have been perfect. He put the check in his wallet, and got out and filled



the plane, then taxied over to where he was picking up the delivery. He was met by the delivery truck, the driver, and a helper/loader. He checked the packing slip against what was being loaded, and signed for it. He was glad to note that his entire GPS unit had arrived, as well as the makings of 3 fanny pack kits. When he checked everything off, he handed the carbon to the driver, and kept the original for Bill. Attached to the original was a separate receipt for all the fanny pack components. It totaled \$140, he had done a good job of estimating the cost. He climbed back into the plane, and taxied to the runway, and called the tower for takeoff clearance. They said he was next to take off, and he taxied right up to the runway, called Rolling, and after double checking the plane was ready to fly, advanced the throttle to full, and was flying with half the runway left. He cruise climbed to 2,000 feet and turned toward Allakaket. 2 hours later he landed in Allakaket. He topped the tanks, and pulled forward to Bill's Jeep. He unloaded the groceries from the plane, and left Ron's GPS and the fanny pack stuff. Ron told Bill "Doc Richardson gave me a \$1,000 dollar tip."

"Ron, that's one heck of a tip, but Doc can afford it, they don't have any kids, and he's a multi-millionaire."

Ron showed him the note. "Ron - now that's special. It seemed you really touched him." Just as they finished, the Aircraft mechanic showed up. Ron showed him what he wanted, and the Mechanic said it would be done in an hour. Hearing that, Bill told Ron to get in, he could keep Ron busy for an hour, he was going to visit Jim. Ron's eyes brightened, He hadn't seen his Grandpa in weeks. They drove up to Jim's trailer, and Bill knocked. Jim looked rough, but his eyes brightened when he saw Ron. Ron gave his Gramps a gentle hug. He felt fragile. They brought in his groceries, then sat down and talked. Ron told Jim about his conversation with the Neurosurgeon, and handed Jim the card. Jim thanked Ron, and hoped that he could help. The side effects of this medicine basically kept him housebound, and he wanted to get out and do stuff. They talked for a while, when Bill looked at his watch, it had been an hour and 15 minutes since he dropped off the plane. Ron got up to say goodbye, and gave Jim another hug. "See you later Gramps."

They drove back to the airplane, and the antenna was installed on the roof of the cockpit, and the cigarette lighter connector and the swivel base was installed. Ron thanked Bill, and did a walk-around, then got in and taxied back to the lake, then flew home.

When he got home, he took the GPS unit and the software into the house, read the manuals, and stuck the CD-ROM into his laptop. He loaded the software onto his hard drive, and loaded the Topo maps of Alaska. He located Allakaket, The HelpmeJack Lake, Sam's House, and the houses of all the homesteaders he delivered to, and then he located all the lodges Bill had told him about. He made them waypoints in the system so the GPS unit would know the UTM coordinates of every way point he plotted. Now all he had to do was call up the correct waypoint, and the compass rose would point the way, and the display would tell him how far he was from the next waypoint. When he was airborne, it would tell him his true ground speed, altitude, and time/distance to next waypoint. True ground speed

used to be dead reckoning, but with GPS, he knew exactly how fast he was moving in relation to the ground, regardless of whether he was flying into a headwind, or with a tailwind, or some sort of crosswind. Time and distance were helpful so he would know when to descend in preparation for landing, and how high to climb between stops. Later he could program in secondary waypoints for unusual height restrictions like the ridge coming into and out of HelpmeJack Lake. When he finished, he shut down the computer and connected the charger, then started working on the fanny pack kits. He had all 3 ready to go by dinner, and after dinner, he worked on his Medical studies. He told Anne about the conversation he had with Doc, and Anne was curious to find out if Doc Richardson would really fill prescriptions for all the drugs she needed for a wilderness Paramedic kit. She made a list of all the drugs and solutions she needed, and decided to e-mail the list to Doc Richardson.

## Chapter 78 - A Minor Disaster

Ron woke up the next morning, got dressed, and walked over to the sink, and looked in the mirror. His Blood-curdling scream brought Roy and Anne on the run.

“Ron, what’s wrong?”

“Mom, what’s wrong with my face?”

Anne looked carefully at his face, then noticed it was covered with Zits.

“Ron, I don’t know how to tell you this, but its part of growing up - you’ve had one of the worst attacks of acne I’ve seen in a while. I’ve got some meds in the kit that will knock those pimples down. Don’t rupture the heads, or they might spread or cause acne scars.”

Anne came back several minutes later with several tubes of medicine, and some soap. “I bought these a couple of years ago just in case. Both Steve and I had bad acne growing up. Good news is with proper hygiene and the application of these medicines, the effects will diminish over time. I went through 6 months of looking like you do, then they disappeared and never returned. You’re lucky you’re going through it so young, since the older you are when you have your first attack, the more likely you are to develop scarring. If you follow Steve’s pattern, you’ll have to shave every morning in 6 months, or wear a beard like your Dad.”

“Mom, I think I’d rather shave, Dad looks like Grizzly Adams.”

Anne laughed, then said, “Yeah, but it tickles when he kisses me.”

Ron was thanking God he wasn’t planning on seeing Samantha for the next couple of days. He hoped the hunters wouldn’t laugh at him.

After the Minor Emergency, Anne made breakfast, then Ron and Roy went out to cut, drag, split, and stack the wood. Ron was so tired he didn’t think about what his face looked like. In the evening, Anne showed him how to wash with the special soap, and not to scrub too hard, since that might break the pimples. Ron was happy that the medicine was starting to work already, and had reduced the size of the pimples. Later that afternoon, Bill called and said he needed to pick some more hunters up in Anchorage at 0900, and fly them to a new lodge. Ron asked Bill if he had a map with UTM coordinates. Bill laughed, and said he had the same software Ron had, then read off the coordinates to Ron, who repeated them back to Bill, then after he signed off, punched them into his software program, and added the location as a waypoint in his GPS unit. His software allowed him to name all his waypoints, so he did to make them easier to retrieve. When he was finished, and turned off his laptop,

Anne told him dinner was ready. Ron helped set the table, and they sat down to eat. Roy said grace, and they ate dinner quietly. After dinner, Ron went back to his medical books, and Roy and Anne read their Bibles. He went to bed early since he had to get up early to be in Anchorage at 0900.

The next morning, Ron was up at 0600, and was airborne by 0700. It took an extra couple of minutes to plug in and set up his GPS unit, but he could save a lot more time in the air. Once the engine was running, he selected the Anchorage Airport waypoint, and taxied to the water, by the time he had reached the end of the lake, the engine was warmed up, and he had the plane configured for take-off. When he turned upwind, he pushed the throttle to full, and as soon as the airspeed indicator said 85 knots, he pulled back on the yoke. He kept up this rate of climb until he cleared the far ridge. He glanced quickly between his altimeter, and the display of his GPS, and was glad they were within a few feet of each other. He turned toward Anchorage, and cruise climbed to 2,000 ft MSL. He was fascinated by the GPS display, the speed deviated from the airspeed indicator, until he realized the airspeed indicator read in nautical miles, and the GPS in statute miles. He'd have to see if he could change the display later to nautical miles to match his airspeed indicator. He brought the owners manual with him, but he wasn't about to mess with it in the air.

The time display worked perfectly, since the speed and distance displays were both in statute miles, so he knew exactly how long at his present speed and heading until the time he had to land. He landed 15 minutes ahead of schedule in Anchorage, and he knew it was due to navigating via the GPS vs. his magnetic compass. He taxied over to the gate, and the hunters were just coming out of the terminal. The skycap helped them load the plane, and Ron readied it for flight. He didn't want the hunters to get too good a look at his face. Once they were all aboard and locked in, Ron gave his "Welcome to Allakaket Airlines" speech, and turned to taxi to the runway. He had plenty of fuel to get to Allakaket, so he didn't stop to fill up. He called the tower, who gave him immediate clearance to take off. He reached the runway, set the plane up for take-off, and called "Rolling". Halfway down the runway, he was airborne, and re-set the GPS for the lodge. He turned to follow the GPS compass, and an hour later, the GPS said that he was at the lodge. He turned to look down, and there was the lake right below him. He did a gentle descending turn to line up with the lake and loose 1500 feet of altitude. He ended up at 500 feet AGL, and about a mile away from the edge of the lake. He lowered the flaps, and slowly reduced his throttle settings, until he was descending at the rate he wanted. He splashed down on the lake with a gentle bump, and taxied to the dock. He thanked the hunters, and the dock worker secured the airplane when the propeller stopped turning, and unloaded the aircraft. He slipped a \$20 to Ron, and thanked him, then buttoned up the aircraft, disconnected the lines holding it to the dock, and pushed it away.

Ron started the engine and taxied to the downwind end of the lake, and entered the waypoint for Allakaket, then set the plane up for take-off. He flew to Allakaket, and was surprised to find he overflowed the middle of the lake, instead of coming in like he usually did, then he

realized the GPS took him to the exact spot he had selected, the middle of the lake. He'd have to re-plot all his waypoints using the highest resolution map so he'd go to the right end of the lake. He landed ok, then taxied to the fuel pumps. Bill was waiting for him. "Ron, did you have a rough day, the hunters said you didn't say two words to them between take-off and landing."

"Bill, look at my face - I look like the Creature from the Black Lagoon."

"Is that's what's bugging you. All teenagers go through acne, or they get it as adults, I'd prefer getting it as a teenager, instead of my 20's. Get over it, most people don't even notice it."

"OK, Bill, I guess I was feeling sorry for myself, I won't let it happen again. Guess what, I learned something today. If I want to navigate with GPS, I have to use the high-resolution map images to set my waypoints. I flew over the middle of the lake at the lodge, and did the same over Allakaket, then I realized the GPS flew me right to the point I specified. If I want to fly to the upwind end of the lake, I need to designate the upwind end of the lake as the waypoint. On the large scale map, there's only a millimeter difference between the ends of the lake, but that can mean over a mile on the ground. I've got to use the 1:24,000 scale, or the 1:12,000 scale for setting waypoints."

"Ron, you're right, now all you need to do is reprogram your GPS. Glad you figured that out now."

"Do you know any way to convert the display from Statute Miles to Nautical Miles?"

"Why would you want to do that?"

"My airspeed indicator in the plane reads in nautical miles, and the GPS reads ground speed in Statute Miles - causes major headaches."

"Best guess, read the manual. If not, you might check out the manufacturer's webpage, or send them an e-mail."

Bill, can I use your internet connection in case I need to return it?"

"OK, I'm not doing anything for a while - make sure you call your Dad first, and bring your GPS and your manual."

Ron opened the cabin door, turned on the radio, and called his Dad, and told him he'd be at Bill's for a while resolving a problem with his GPS unit. Roy told Ron to call him when he was in the air, and said goodbye. Ron turned off the radio, switched off the battery, and took the ignition key. He grabbed the GPS, the box with the manual and the cable, and walked

over to Bill's Jeep. They drove over to his office, and Bill connected to the internet with his Satellite DSL. Bill had a 6 foot satellite dish, so he didn't need to mess with Directwave, and had a great connection. While Bill connected, Ron thumbed through the manual. The only thing he couldn't find was how to change the display from statute miles to nautical miles. Ron found the webpage address, and entered it. He found the FAQ section, and it mentioned converting the display, but didn't mention his model by name. Bill called the 800 number, and spoke to the head of Customer service, who said to follow the instructions for all the Meridian models. Ron looked up the instructions for the Meridian models, and followed the instructions exactly, then turned his unit off and on. The display came up in Nautical miles, and he was good to go. He thanked Bill, then remembered he was carrying that \$1,000.00 check in his wallet, endorsed it, and asked Bill to deposit it in his account. When Bill finished with the paperwork, he drove Ron back to his plane, and Ron took off. He called his Dad, and looking at his GPS, told him he was 45 minutes out. Roy said he'd have the hangar open, and said goodbye. Once he had the lake in sight, Ron ignored his GPS, and flew his usual approach. He landed gently, and taxied to the hangar, then shut down. He took his GPS, manual and box inside with him, and spent the rest of the afternoon re-programming his waypoints.

## Chapter 79 - Flying Again

Later that afternoon, Bill called up Ron on the Radio, they had another “hurry-up” contract tomorrow. Seems like pilots were canceling out left and right with mechanical problems. He had to pick up 3 hunters in Anchorage and fly them to the northern lodge at 0900 tomorrow, turn around, and pick up another load of 2 hunters in Anchorage for the southern lodge, then take the 3 he had dropped off the other day at the Southern lodge back to Anchorage, since they had all got their caribou and had arranged early flights to go home. Ron worked everything out on his map software, and determined that if he filled up in Anchorage between trips, he could do it easily, then fly to Allakaket on the way home, and fill up. He called Bill back, and told him what he planned to do. He thought that would be great, and would save 1 round trip to Allakaket off his routing. Ron said he’d call Bill tomorrow morning when he was wheels up. Ron set his alarm for 0600, and he knew he’d have to hurry, so he asked him Mom if he could have “breakfast to go” tomorrow, which meant some muffins and coffee. She said she’d pack a couple of P&J sandwiches too. Ron checked his waypoints on his GPS, and they were all there and properly loaded. He turned it off, and made sure it was connected to the charger. About this time Anne said dinner was ready. Ron went into the kitchen to wash his hands, and noticed his zits were less noticeable. He thanked God for small favors, and went to help set the table. They sat down, and Roy said grace. After dinner, Ron spent a couple of hours studying his books, then said goodnight since he had to get up early.

The next morning, his alarm went off at 0600, and he was dressed by 0615, grabbed his GPS, breakfast and lunch, and was out the door by 0630. He opened the hangar doors, put everything in the cabin, connected the GPS, and did a quick walk-around. Then he started the motor and let it idle while he performed his pre-flight checklist. At 0645 he was taxiing out to the lake, and setting the plane up to take off. He punched in the waypoint for Anchorage airport, and when he was at the end of the lake, turned upwind, made a quick check of his instruments to make sure the motor was warmed up, and pushed the throttle to full. At 85 knots, he pulled back on the yoke, and was flying. At 500ft AGL, he turned toward Anchorage, and cruise climbed to 2,000 ft MSL. He called Bill and told him he was en route to Anchorage, and should be there at 0900. At 0840, The GPS indicated he was close enough to call the tower, and got immediate clearance, and the gate number. At 0845, he could see the runway, and called “Final”. He touched down a minute later, and taxied the entire length of the runway, then turned to the correct gate. He was at the gate at 0850 waiting for the hunters. This time he got out, opened all the doors, and when the Skycap brought the bags, introduced himself to the hunters, and helped the skycap load the bags, then asked if anyone would care to ride up front. When they had all boarded, he made sure everyone was secured and the doors locked, then he started the motor, and turned toward his passengers, and gave them the “Welcome to Allakaket Airlines” speech. They thought it was funny, then he called the tower and requested permission to take off. They were given immediate clearance, so Ron hustled over to the runway, and set up while he was taxiing.

He got to the end of the runway, called the tower to advise they were on the runway. They said they were totally clear, and could proceed to 2,000 feet whenever they wanted. Ron thanked the controller, and pushed the throttle to full, and was airborne with half the runway left.

After almost 2 hours, his GPS said he was close enough to descend to 500 feet and prepare for landing. Looking out the windscreen, he saw the lake dead ahead, and slowed and lowered his flaps. He made a perfect landing, and taxied up to the dock. The dockworker secured the plane, and then opened the passenger side doors. Ron said "Thank you for flying Allakaket Airlines, enjoy your stay in Alaska." The hunters were cracking up as they stepped onto the dock. When they were out, the dockworker quickly unloaded their baggage. One of the hunters ducked back into the front cabin, said "You did really well son, here's a small tip" and handed him a \$20.00 bill. Ron thanked him, and told him he hoped he got a big caribou. The hunter had to get out, because the dockworker was ready to button up the plane, and Ron was on a tight schedule. Once all the doors were secure, the dockworker untied the lines securing the plane to the dock, and pushed him off. When Ron was far enough away, he started the motor, and taxied to the downwind end of the lake, set the GPS for Anchorage, then set the plane up for take-off.

As soon as he was above 500 ft, he turned for Anchorage, and cruise climbed to 2,000 feet. Ron thought that flying using the GPS was a walk in the park. He really didn't need his uncle's Pilot's Chronograph since the GPS clock was so accurate, but kept it anyway as a backup like his compass. Ron looked at his GPS display, and his ground speed was 10 knots slower than his airspeed - he must be bucking a headwind. 10 knots wasn't bad, but he was in a hurry, and pushed the throttle up some more until his ETA was under 2 hours. When he was 5 minutes out, he called the tower, and they were surprised he was back again so soon. Then they found his pickup listed on the arrival sheet, and told him which gate to taxi to, and that he had immediate clearance to land. He set up the plane for landing, and remembered to extend the landing gear. He came in a little hot since he was in a hurry, but compensated perfectly, and kissed the runway, then set the nose wheel down. He taxied the entire length of the runway without touching the brakes, then turned toward his scheduled gate. He got there a couple of minutes early, so he shut down and opened the cabin doors before the hunters got there.

This time there were only 2 passengers, and they decided to sit in back, since neither was that comfortable flying. He helped the skycap load the baggage, then did a quick walk-around, and climbed into the pilot's seat. After starting the engine, he turned and gave them the "Welcome to Allakaket Airlines" speech. They didn't seem to think it was too funny. He taxied to the fuel depot, and topped off both tanks, then making sure the caps were secured, walked back into the plane, and taxied to the runway while setting the plane up for take-off. He called the tower, and they said he was next in line. Finally, they said he was clear to take off right as he was turning onto the runway. He acknowledged, and pushed the engine to full. He lifted off as smoothly as he could, and made a gentle turn toward the



southern lodge. He then cruise climbed to 2,000 feet, and 2 hours later, the GPS said it was time to descend for landing, and he pushed in the throttle a little, and the plane went down so slowly they didn't even notice. 5 minutes later, he set the flaps for landing, and pushed the throttle in further. They touched down so softly that they didn't even know they had landed until they heard the pontoons spraying water onto the bottom of the plane. He taxied up to the dock, and the dockworker secured the plane, and opened the passenger door. Ron said "Thanks for flying Allakaket Airlines, Enjoy your stay in Alaska."

Once they were clear of the dock, the 3 returning hunters were loaded. When the cabin doors were closed, Ron started the motor and started to taxi to the far end of the lake, then turned in his seat. "Gentlemen, I wanted to apologize for last time. I didn't mean to be rude, I woke up that morning with the worst case of zits you had ever seen in your life, and I was seriously self-conscious."

The hunter in front said "Don't worry kid, you should have seen me as a teenager - They called me "Pizza Face" until after my 18<sup>th</sup> birthday. You look a lot better today. I think the newer medicines work better." Ron got the plane configured for take-off, set the GPS for Anchorage, and when he had turned upwind, pushed the throttle to full. He was flying shortly, and turned for Anchorage. When he reached cruising altitude, he asked them about their trip, and they got into a 2-hour "hunting story" session. Ron checked the GPS, and he needed to call the tower. They gave him a direct route, and instructions to get to the right gate. He thanked the controller, and 5 minutes later spotted the runway, and called "final" He set the plane up quickly for landing, and remembered to extend the landing gear. He made a perfect landing, and taxied to the gate, then said "Thanks for flying Allakaket Airlines, hope you enjoyed the flight." They had a good laugh, and Ron shut the engine down, and opened his door as soon as the prop stopped spinning, then he walked around to unlock their doors, and helped the skycap unload the plane. The hunter who was sitting in front gave Ron a \$50 bill, and told him he hoped that they could use him when they came back. Ron said he hoped it would be soon, because in a little more than 2 years, he was going to the Air Force Academy. One of the guys in the back said his son just graduated, shook Ron's hand and wished him luck. They had to catch a flight so they were in a hurry, and Ron had to get back home before dark, so they said a quick goodbye, and Ron secured the plane and did a quick walk-around then got in the pilot's seat, locked the door, programmed the GPS for Allakaket, and taxied to the runway while setting up for take-off and getting permission to take off. He got permission right before he reached the runway, and when he turned onto the runway, called "Rolling" and advanced the throttle to full. The lightly loaded plane left the runway sooner than Ron expected, and he went with it.

When he was 500ft AGL, he turned for Allakaket, and cruise climbed to 2,000 feet. On his way back, Ron noticed that his ground speed was 20 knots faster than his airspeed. That 10 knot headwind was now a 20 knot tailwind. He took advantage of it, and reduced throttle to save fuel. He got to Allakaket at the same time, but saved several gallons of avgas. He reduced throttle when he got to Allakaket, and called the tower. 5 minutes later, he landed

smoothly on the lake, taxied to the pumps, and filled up the tanks. Bill drove up, and told Ron that he had only good news for him. He was going to be busy the next week or so flying hunters in and out of lodges. Bill handed him a list, and every day had 2 flights scheduled. At \$500 a flight, that was \$1,000 per day after expenses. He could easily make 10-20 thousand dollars in the next couple of weeks plus tips. He was glad he was going to be so busy, because that meant he had a built-in excuse not to see Sam. He really didn't want to see her until his acne got under control. He taxied back to the lake, and turned downwind, set the plane up for take-off, and brought up the waypoint for home. When he reached the end of the lake, he turned upwind, gunned the throttle, and was airborne. Once he had cleared the ridge, he turned for home, and set up a cruise climb, then called home. He told them when he would be home, and that Mom needed to bake some more muffins, because he'd be doing 2-a-days for the next week or so. When they disconnected, he switched frequencies and gave Sam the bad news. She took it pretty well considering, and he put it out of his mind.

A little over an hour later, the GPS unit said he was over the lake, and he turned onto his approach, and set the flaps, then reduced throttle until he was right on his perfect glide path to a 3-wire touchdown. The only difference between landing an amphibian on a small lake, and a carrier landing was you did it during the day, and there was no one critiquing your landing. However, you had the harshest critic ever - if you missed, you didn't get a go-around, you were a statistic. Some bush pilots acted like they clanked when they walked, and others just admitted they were exceptionally lucky. Ron was still one of the latter, and knew that a lot of the former didn't live to old age. He taxied to the cabin, and into the open hangar doors. Mom and Dad were waiting for him, and Lucky came charging all the way from inside the cabin. Ron was ready for him this time, and just got a major case of doggy slobber instead of getting knocked down and licked to death. Anne gave her son a hug, she said "I'm not going to kiss that drooled-up face." Roy hugged his son too, but a little more fiercely. Ron went inside and washed up, then Anne had him kiss her cheek. She noticed his skin was clearing up, and told him. Ron showed his parents his schedule for the next two weeks. While he'd make a lot of money in a short time, he'd just be home enough to eat and sleep. If he didn't already have his GED, Anne might have protested that he needed to study. Roy just told his son to be careful, and make sure he got enough sleep. Ron turned on his computer, located all the places he was flying to, and made sure the waypoints were loaded on his GPS, then shut down the computer.

"Ron, remember that neurosurgeon's card you gave me last week, well, I had Bill call, and she gave me a e-mail address, and I e-mailed her a list, she said Doctor Richardson told her to give us anything we wanted, and instead of loaning you his books on wilderness medicine, he told her to buy a complete set of medical books, including a current PDR. She asked if we wanted hard copies or CD-ROMs, since the PDR comes on disk, and most of the major books are in indexed Adobe PDF format. Since you're going to be using them, I told her I'd ask you."

“Dad, how are we fixed for power?”

“You know the solar panels will stop working during the winter once the roofs are covered in snow, but that Air-X we bought seems to work, and not ice up too bad in the winter. You should be good to go all winter unless we get an ice storm like we had 10 years ago.”

“Ok, Mom, please ask her to ship as many books that come on CD-ROMs as CD’s That will save a ton of shipping, and hopefully get them here faster.”

“Ok Ron, I’ll tell her, and I’ve already e-mailed her a list of the meds and supplies we need.”

The Solar/Wind power system they had installed several years ago was still working fine, and since the laptop came with a 12vdc Cigarette Lighter Adapter, they decided to build a small battery bank with 2 400Ah 6-volt Trojan Golf Cart batteries, and a small controller for the solar panels. The 400Ah battery bank was more than enough power to run his laptop, and charge the GPS unit. He had a little inverter to run his DSL internet connection. During the winter, the satellite dish tended to ice up, so it was harder to use during the winter, but he had good access 9 months out of the year.

An hour later, Anne announced Dinner was ready, and Ron went in to wash his face and hands. It seemed the medicine and the soap was working. He helped his Dad set the table, and they sat down. After Roy said grace, they had Ron’s favorite dish, Caribou Stew. After dinner, Ron studied for a while, and Anne baked some more bran muffins with raisins, since the doc said Roy needed the fiber, and Ron liked the taste. Ron told Anne he still had his P&J sandwiches from yesterday, so she didn’t have to make any more. Ron would only eat Peanut Butter and Jelly sandwiches if he was REALLY hungry. After studying for a while, Ron went to bed early, since he had to be up at 0600 again.

## Chapter 80 - The Friendly Skies

Ron got up at 0600, and was in the air shortly thereafter. He made 2 successful pickups and deliveries, and got a \$20 and a \$40 tip respectively. When he landed at Anchorage to pick up his final fare, the tower warned him that a very powerful thunderstorm was spotted in the vicinity of Allakaket, but it should be out of his flight path by the time he got there. They gave him clearance to take off, since he was still within VFR limits. If he wasn't so tired he might have used better judgment and stayed in Anchorage. But he had a fare that needed to get to his lodge, and the tower did say that it should clear out by the time he got there.

He filled his tanks, checked the oil, and did a quick walk-around. He got back into the plane, and gave his "Welcome to Allakaket Airlines" Speech. His passengers thought he had missed his calling, and should have been a stand-up comedian. He taxied to the runway and took off. He set his GPS for the lodge, and a little over an hour, made a textbook landing. The only way his passengers knew they were landing was the spray flying up from the pontoons. He taxied up to the dock, and the dockworker made short work of securing the plane and unloading the passenger's baggage. Meanwhile, Ron had set up the plane to take off again, and set his GPS to Allakaket. After the dockworker turned him loose, he taxied to the end of the lake, and took off. He made it halfway to Allakaket when the storm caught him from his blind side. He went from flying in clear weather to cloudy weather, and poor visibility. Suddenly the plane dropped out from under him. Realizing he was in a downdraft, he pushed the throttle to max to gain airspeed. 30 seconds later, he was out of the downdraft, but was dangerously low to the ground. He set the plane for max climb at his current heading, and didn't look out of the cabin until his altimeter said 2,000 feet. He was still in heavy cloud cover, and realized he was lost. His GPS was still working, but the heading to Allakaket was totally wrong. Ron got a grip on his fear, realized he was disoriented from the heavy weather, so decided to trust his GPS. He turned the plane until it was facing toward Allakaket, and called the tower for a weather check. "Allakaket Control, this is Ron, how do you read me?"

"Ron, you're scratchy but readable. You might be flying through the thunderstorm that just rolled through here."

"I just flew through a downdraft, but I'm OK. Where is the thunderstorm now?"

It's about 10 miles northwest of us."

Ron looked at the GPS, and he was about 30 miles Northeast of Allakaket. He looked at his fuel gauge, and he had plenty of fuel to make it home and back to Allakaket the next morning.

"Allakaket Control, is Jim there?"

“You can try him on 145.645Mhz.”

“Thanks Control, Switching frequencies now.”

“Jim, its Ron. I just flew through a downdraft. I can make it to either Allakaket or home and back on fuel, what should I do?”

“How are you feeling Ron?”

“Kind of nervous, but I’m OK.”

“Ron, I want you to land at Allakaket and spend the night here. I’ve got a spare room.”

“OK, Gramps, I’ll be there in 10 minutes. I need to call the tower.”

“Allakaket tower, this is Ron again, requesting landing permission and instructions.

“OK Ron, you’re cleared to land, be advised we are experiencing strong cross winds as high as 20-30 knots at this time.”

“Roger, thanks for the information.”

Ron turned toward Allakaket, and as soon as he got close enough to start to land, he reduced throttle and cranked out the flaps. He kicked in some serious right rudder to steer into the wind. As he cleared the rise, he edged the throttle in until the plane sank to the lake. Once he was safely on the lake, he said a quick prayer of thanks, and turned toward the ramp out of the lake, and deployed his landing gear. He taxied up to the fuel pump, and when he got out, Jim and Bill were waiting for him. Jim gave him a big hug and asked “You sure you’re OK?”

At that point Ron started to get the shakes, just as Jim thought. They carried him to the car, and dropped him off at Jim’s place. Jim called Roy and Anne, and said that Ron was staying there overnight, and he was OK. Jim had put Ron in his spare bed, and Ron fell asleep right after he went to bed.

The next morning, Ron got up, and was confused until he remembered where he was and why. Jim had breakfast ready for him, and when he was through eating, Jim asked him what happened.

“Gramps, it was scary. I was maybe 20 miles Northwest of Allakaket when the sky grew dark all of a sudden, and the visibility went from maybe 20 miles to less than a mile. Then the plane bucked and I looked at the altimeter, and it was unwinding fast. I was maybe 1500 feet above ground, and the altimeter was reading 2,000 feet. I shoved the throttle to max, and didn’t dive to gain airspeed since I was already falling faster than 1,000 feet per minute. I held the nose on the horizon and prayed I’m make it out of the downburst before I ran out of altitude. When I ran out of the downburst on the far side, I checked my altimeter, and it read 500 feet, meaning the ground was dangerously close, so I left the throttle at full, and pulled back on the yoke as much as I dared, and clawed my way back up to 2,000 feet. When I got back up to 2,000 feet, I had no ground references, and the GPS compass rose was pointing at 270 degrees, when my previous heading was 180 degrees. I was lost and disoriented for a minute, then I calmed down and realized escaping the downdraft had blown me off course, and the GPS was right, so I decided to trust the GPS and turned to a heading of 270, then I called the tower and got your frequency. You know the rest, except there was a 20-30 knot crosswind when I landed at Allakaket. I was never more scared in my life.”

“Ron, I’ve got good news and bad news. I heard the FAA weather report yesterday on my radio, and according to that, you shouldn’t have flown anywhere near Allakaket. The good news is you did exactly the right thing once you were in the downdraft; you maxed your throttle and held the nose on the horizon. Diving that slow-flying plane wouldn’t have gotten you out of the downdraft any faster, and would have eaten up critical altitude. If you were 1500 ft AGL, and your altimeter read 2,000 feet at the start, and 500 feet at the bottom, you were theoretically on the ground when you recovered. Even an extra second at that altitude could have resulted in a crash. Diving would have meant a fatal crash, since it would have increased your rate of descent. The reason I had you land at Allakaket should be obvious to you. You were shaken up from the near-crash, and were in no condition to land that big plane at your tiny lake. You have to remember this: 1) Keep your mind on Flying. 2) Always watch as much around your aircraft as possible, and keep your head outside the plane. 3) Avoid thunderstorms like the plague - they can affect air currents up to 20 miles away from the visible thunderhead. 4) NEVER fly in bad weather unless it’s a life-or-death emergency. Your passenger could have stayed overnight in Anchorage, or you could have returned to Anchorage yourself after dropping him off. Flying towards Allakaket was a deadly mistake, and you almost paid for it with your life.”

“Gramps, the tower said that the weather was clearing, and Allakaket should be clear by the time I got there.”

“Ron, the pilot always has the final say about whether it is safe to fly. Don’t rely on the tower, they’re not professional meteorologists. Always check the FAA weather forecast before flying. If necessary, they have a radio always monitored during business hours, and you can call them if you’re in doubt. Of if you’re radio can reach me, call me.”

“Thanks, Gramps - I learned my lesson.”

Bill walked in about then, and told Ron he had cancelled his flights for the next couple of days. Ron felt like he was being punished until Jim spoke up. “Ron, I told Bill to cancel your flights, you’re only 14, and you almost died yesterday. You need a few days to get your head on straight, and get over this. The weather is great today, how about if we go flying?”

“I’d love that Gramps are you feeling up to it?”

“That neurosurgeon’s nurse called my doctor and recommended some new medications. While I still can’t be the pilot, I feel 100% better.”

“Great, let’s go.”

The three of them got in Bill’s car, and drove them to the “airport”. Ron and Jim did a complete walk-around, checked that the oil and gas were full, and got in to preflight. Jim felt funny getting in the passenger seat, almost every time he got aboard his plane, he was in the pilot’s seat. Ron went through the pre-flight checklist, then started the engine, and let it warm up, and completed his pre-flight checks while the engine was warming up. Ron turned to Jim, who was nodding his head approvingly. Ron was very thorough checking the plane. With the engine fully warmed up, Ron taxied to the ramp, and slowly rolled down. When he was fully waterborne, he raised the landing gear to their fully retracted position, and taxied to the downwind end of the lake. Ron asked Jim “Where to?”

“Let’s fly up to your place.”

Ron reached over and set the waypoint on the GPS. Jim asked “What’s that?”

Ron decided to have a little fun with his Grandpa “It’s some newfangled gadget that tells me where to fly.”

“Real Funny Mr. Smart-aleck.”

“Gramps, It’s a Global Positioning Satellite Receiver, it’s what kept me from crashing yesterday. I programmed in all my stops as waypoints into the receiver, and as you can see, it gives me bearing, distance and time to the waypoint. If I get disoriented, the GPS knows where I am, and where the next waypoint is. If my Uncle Ron would have had one of these, I probably would have never been born, since as soon as he would have looked at his GPS, he would have known he was off course, and which way to fly to get back on course. The only drawback to these systems is they don’t warn you if there are any intervening mountains between you and the next waypoint, so you have to know what your safe altitudes are at all times, in case the GPS steers you right into a mountain. It works by receiving radio signals from a bunch of geosynchronous satellites that orbit over the same spot on the earth. It triangulates your position in 3 dimensions, and it does all the math to guide you to the next

waypoint you enter into the receiver. Some receivers are accurate to within 3 feet, and others to within 15 feet. As you can see, it even has a function to convert speed and distance displayed from Statute to Nautical Miles, so the display on my airspeed indicator is the same as the GPS's display of my airspeed. It calculates your speed over the ground, and can estimate how long it will take you at your existing speed to reach the next waypoint. If I speed up, the countdown time decreases, and if I slow down, it increases."

"How much did all this cost?"

"About \$500.00, but I've saved over \$100 in gas and time so far."

"I wish they would have had these 30 years ago, it would have made flying a whole lot easier around here."

"Gramps, if you start flying your Cessna again, I can easily afford to get you one, and have the aircraft mechanic install it for you. Bill and I both have the mapping software to program all your waypoints in advance. You could program in all your favorite fishing holes."

"Except then Bill would know all my secret fishing spots."

"Big Secret Gramps - I think everyone in Allakaket goes to the same fishing holes."

Ron reached the end of the lake and quickly set the plane up for takeoff. Jim was impressed by Ron's speed and confidence setting the controls. He could remember how tentative he was just a few months ago, now he could practically set the plane up blindfolded. Ron turned to Jim "Ready for take-off Gramps?" Jim gave him a thumbs-up, and Ron called the tower and received permission to take off. Ron pushed the throttle to full, and as soon as the airspeed indicator hit 85 knots, he pulled back on the yoke, and was flying. When he reached 500 feet AGL, he turned for home, and cruise-climbed to 2,000 feet.

During the flight back to the house, Ron and Jim caught up with each other. Ron related his experience of his first attack of zits, and Jim nearly laughed himself silly. Seeing Ron's hurt expression, Jim explained that he wasn't laughing at Ron, it just reminded him of an experience he had of having a major attack right before the Senior Prom. He wanted to go to the prom with a bag over his head. When he finally got to the prom, he saw Homecoming King and Class President had a worse case of Pizza Face than he did. Ron laughed as well, then the GPS beeped. "Time to drop down to 500 feet and get ready to land." Ron threw the plane into a banking turn to lose altitude, and came out lined up for the lake at 600 feet. He quickly got the wings level, cranked out the flaps, and took off 500 rpm. As soon as he cleared the ridge, he chopped the throttle, and he floated down to the lake as light as a feather. He barely splashed as the pontoons made contact with the water. He slid to a stop 75 feet from the other end of the lake, and taxied over to their beach, and deployed the



landing gear, then slowly rolled onto the beach, and taxied to the hangar. Ron was surprised that the hangar doors were open, since he'd forgotten to call home on his way in. Roy, Anne, and Lucky were waiting on the porch as they walked out of the hangar on their way to the house. Lucky took off like a shot, and almost succeeded in knocking Ron over. Jim gave Anne a big hug, and shook Roy's hand. They went inside for a minute while Ron was playing with Lucky.

Roy asked Jim "What happened yesterday?"

"Roy, I'm not going to sugar coat it, Ron made a error in judgment yesterday, and almost crashed when he flew too close to a thunderstorm and got caught in a downdraft. He did everything right after that first mistake, and I told him to land at Allakaket. He stayed there overnight since I knew he was in no condition to fly. He seems to have gotten over it, since he flew perfectly today, and seems to be his old self again, even teasing me about his new GPS unit. By the way, I think that GPS saved his life, since he got disoriented after getting out of the downdraft, and had to rely on the GPS to get him back to Allakaket. Bill's given him the next couple of days off, but I think he's OK. He learned his lesson, and I'm going to take him back up and have him do a few more landing and take-offs, but I think he's fine."

"Should he cut back on his flying?"

"No, I think he'd feel he was being punished. He can handle the 2 a day flights, but he learned a valuable lesson that getting a passenger where they want to go isn't worth risking his life or the plane. I doubt if he'll make that mistake again."

"Jim, It's funny you mention it, because the weather seemed pretty marginal when Ron flew me out here the first time."

"Exactly, he was too worried about losing a fare instead of his own safety - like I said, "There are old pilots and bold pilots, but very few old bold pilots.'""

Just about then Ron walked in. Roy and Anne both ran to his side, and gave him a group bear hug. Lucky just sat there wondering what all the excitement was for.

"Mom, Dad - I'm OK. I did something really stupid yesterday, and luckily I survived. It won't happen again."

Anne spoke up "Ron, until we talked to Jim, we were halfway tempted to ground you, but Jim explained how and why it happened, and realized that the only reason it happened was a momentary lapse of judgment, and that can happen to anyone."

"Yeah, like the time I chopped down that tree that fell on me. If I'd have checked it more

carefully, I would have realized it was old and rotten, and could have fallen on me, and I would have selected another. I just need to know that you've learned from this son, because something similar cost Ron his life, and left me stranded here."

"Dad, Jim and I have already been over this. The only time I'm going to fly in bad weather is a life and death emergency. I should have either told the guy I'd fly him out the next day, or returned to Anchorage and flown home the next morning."

Jim spoke up, "Ron you've got enough money in your account now - why not set up an account with the hotel we stayed at. They can arrange round-trip transportation from the airport, and bill your account. That way, you can get a commercial rate, and save some money. Also, you could put your passenger up as well, as a show of good faith, and it will increase your chances of flying them out the next day."

"Thanks Gramps, that's an excellent idea."

## Chapter 81 - Fall Already?

The next several months passed quickly for Ron, he flew twice a day for 2 months, then at least once a day until fall. He only saw Samantha when he made deliveries, and he was glad to see she had cooled toward him considerably. He didn't know whether it was his acne, or she'd found somebody else, but he was off the hook. Since he was busier than a one-armed paper hanger, he didn't even have time to think about missing her. His incident with the downburst made him a much more careful pilot, and he ended up staying in Anchorage twice, and once he paid for his customer's room. Word of that incident quickly spread through the lodges, and most of them wanted Ron flying their customers. They felt that anyone who would put their passenger's safety ahead of making money, then offer to pay for their rooms when bad weather forced them to delay their flight, was someone they wanted to do business with. Bill was ecstatic when a week later Ron was fully booked for next season. Thanks to the new meds, Jim got better and was soon flying the little Cessna 185 to his favorite fishing holes. True to his word, Ron bought another GPS unit for Jim, and had the mechanic install it. Ron showed him how to program it, then Jim borrowed Bill's computer, and after Bill showed him how to use the mapping software, Jim kicked him out of the room, and programmed all his favorite fishing spots, then copied the map page with all his waypoints to a floppy disk and didn't save it on the hard disk. Bill was laughing to himself, since he already knew all of Jim's "secret" fishing holes since they used to go fishing together all the time.

During his spare time, Ron studied the books the Neurosurgeon had sent. The CD-ROMs were installed in his laptop, and he preferred using them to the heavy hardbound books. The doctor even included a 2004 version of the PDR, with free updates. He also shipped almost 100 pounds of various medicines and supplies including pills, injectables, and IV solutions; most of which were unavailable without a DEA number. Ron sent an e-mail to the doctor thanking him for his generosity. They kept in touch infrequently over the next couple of years since they were both busy. Ron talked to Bill, who located a used ATV in Allakaket that had been in storage for the last couple of years, so Bill sold it to Ron cheap, along with 4 5-gallon gas cans full of Avgas. The aircraft mechanic was also a welder, and welded a hitch to the ATV, and Ron bought a used ATV trailer that could haul a couple of quartered caribou. In low gear, the ATV could pull a lot of weight, so Ron surprised his parents one day by flying the ATV, trailer, and the Avgas to the cabin. Roy thought it was a good idea, since he couldn't do heavy physical labor anymore; even pushing the cart while Ron pulled was out of the question.

Ron was surfing the internet, and came across a webpage with information on several Winter sports, including Biathlon. Ron felt the combination of cross-country skiing and shooting would be a fun way to pass the winter and would keep his shooting skills sharp. Roy and Anne bought cross-country skis as well, since snowshoeing was a young man's way of getting around. They'd use the snowshoes to get around the cabin, but Anne realized that

daily cross-country skiing would be great exercise for Roy. They placed an order for 2 cases of CCI Mini-mag ammo, and found some used florescent orange golf balls for targets on E-bay, and bought all the seller had (several hundred). Ron couldn't justify spending over \$3,000 on an Anschutz Biathlon 1827 Fortner. Instead Roy contacted his gunsmith, who said he could build a custom Ruger 10/22 with a suppressor for 1/3 the cost of the Anschutz gun, that he would guarantee to shoot a half-inch group at 100 yards. Ron picked it up in Anchorage on one of his last deliveries before winter. Once the lake froze, he'd have to take off the pontoons, and put skis on the plane.

Ron waited as long as possible to go caribou hunting, since he was busy flying. He picked one of the last warm days of fall to go. Anne insisted he carry a full backpack including a small tent and mummy style sleeping bag. The batteries on his GPs were fully charged, and he had a weeks worth of food. He set out early one morning with the trailer hitched up to the ATV, with a spare can of gas attached to the trailer. He made good time the first day, and made it all the way to the caribou hunting grounds. He stopped a mile short of the caribou grounds, and hiked in so he wouldn't spook the game. As he crested the ridge, he was relieved to see the meadow full of Caribou. He just needed 2 big males, and spotted 2 likely candidates. Dropping his pack, he crawled forward with his rifle to a good shooting position, and quickly set up. 2 shots later, both males were down with a single shot to the spine, so he hiked back to the ATV, and drove right up to the caribou. He spent the rest of the day skinning, gutting and quartering the caribous, so he decided to camp overnight, pitched his tent and started a fire before it got too dark. He had plenty of food, so he didn't cook any of the caribou. At first light, he drove home with the 2 quartered caribou and their hides secured to the trailer. He couldn't drive as fast with a loaded trailer, so he camped overnight about halfway home. The next morning, he drove up to the cabin, and Roy helped him unload. Ron told his Dad it was much easier hunting with an ATV, especially being able to use horsepower instead of human power to haul the carcasses back. They took the rest of the day smoking and canning the meat.

They now had plenty of meat, and they had already picked and canned the garden, so Ron used the ATV to help him chop and drag several dozen trees over to re-stock their wood pile. It took him 1/3 of the time to move the trees with the ATV as before, and by the end of the day, he had enough trees stacked by the sawhorse to take him a week to cut to length and split. He parked the ATV next to the snow blower in the metal shed. He spent the rest of the week cutting the logs to length, splitting and stacking them. Roy helped where he could, and they had the wood cut and stacked quicker than he remembered it taking. They filled every nook and cranny inside the cabin with firewood, and built up the windbreak, then drained and stored the water pumps after they filled all their indoor water containers. They now had almost 100 gallons of water in storage. The next day, Bill called to tell them to batten down the hatches, the first major snowstorm of the season was on its way, and would hit them early tomorrow. Ron checked the hangar to make sure the plane was OK, and started a small fire in the woodstove, then banked coals around it. He knew that would keep the hangar from freezing for at least 24 hours. He took the skins down from the smokehouse roof.

Lucky was wondering what all the fuss was for. He'd find out soon enough.

The next day dawned bright and clear, but the clouds to the west looked ominous. By 10:00, the wind had risen from 10 to almost 40 knots, and the clouds to the west were looking very bad. By noon, the snow had started falling fast and furious, and the wind was howling. Ron took Lucky out around 11:00, and hoped he could hold it a while, since he didn't want to go out in that storm. By 1:00, Ron had lost his internet connection, so he shut his DSL modem down to conserve power. Ron knew they could be cooped up here for days, and decided to make the best of it. He knew he shouldn't go outside as long as the wind was blowing as hard as it was. He made use of the time by reading the medical books the doctor had given him, and playing Flight Simulator. He kept checking the meter on his battery bank, and the Air-X was still making power. He knew that the solar panels would stop working as soon as enough snow covered them, and wouldn't start working until they cleared them off, and the sun was shining again. The Air-X wind generator was making more than enough power to keep up with his laptop, and his battery bank was big enough to run it for 12 hours without recharging. Roy had gotten Anne a treadle-operated antique Singer sewing machine years ago, and Anne spent the winter sewing and reading. They all were wearing their Caribou hide clothes and boots, which were the warmest clothes they owned. Anne was wearing the same dress she wore when she nursed Ron. She wanted to change the bodice from a lace-up to a zip-up for modesty, but Roy told her he liked the lace-up better, and she called him a "Horny Old Goat". Roy's attempt at imitating a goat made Anne laugh hysterically. Ron couldn't care less, and was used to seeing his Mother's cleavage since she wore the dress every winter since he was born. The female body held no mystery to him, since he had spent all that time studying comparative anatomy, and had a doctor's appreciation for the human body. He didn't have access to pornography and never developed a twisted view of women's bodies, so he thought that Anne's attire was perfectly natural.

When the storm abated, Lucky made it clear to Ron that he needed to GO. Ron grabbed his jacket and snowshoes just in case, and Roy helped him with the door. It wasn't stuck too badly, and while Lucky took care of business, they cleared the porch, and cleared a path to the outhouse, which they both visited. In deference to his father's older bladder, he let his Dad go first. Anne came out and decided she needed to use the facilities. Roy handed her a flashlight to check out the nooks and crannies just in case. Anne thought he wasn't very funny. When they had finished, the wind picked up and Ron realized that this was just a lull in the storm, so got back inside. Lucky beat them all in, taking full advantage of his "Four paw drive". He burrowed into a bearskin rug, and was quickly asleep.

Several hours later, Anne looked at her watch, and realized it was late afternoon, and started dinner. Ron had been busy all afternoon studying his books, and Roy occupied himself by reading his Bible. When dinner was ready, she called them to the table. Lucky was fast asleep, so Ron let him lay there, and didn't wake him up for dinner. They sat down and said grace, and had an animated conversation about what they were doing. Most of the medical stuff Ron and Anne were talking about was over Roy's head, but he remembered a lot of it

from his studies 15 years ago. He realized he needed to review as well, since he couldn't remember everything. They discussed his idea while they ate, and Anne suggested they study together, since Ron knew medical terminology and anatomy now as well or better than she did. After dinner, Ron picked up his Bible and read for a few hours, then kissed his mom and dad goodnight. Later that night, Ron needed his earplugs since Roy and Anne were making so much noise in bed. It wasn't any of his business what they did in bed, and was glad for the earplugs to drown out the sounds of passion.

The next morning dawned bright clear and cold. After breakfast, he got out his cross-country skis and poles. Roy and Anne decided to pass, so he strapped on his fanny pack and shoulder holster, then put on his parka over his caribou hide clothes. Funny how natural hides like caribou that were tanned with the hair on were warmer and more durable than any man-made fabric. He put on his daypack over his parka with his Camelback bladder, some food, and an emergency shelter. He checked the batteries on his GPS, and entered a waypoint for the cabin, so he could find his way home. He stuck the GPS inside his inside coat pocket where it would stay warm. Even the lithium ion batteries in the GPS were susceptible to cold weather. Ron whistled for Lucky, who looked like he'd rather stay in the nice warm cabin, then came trotting out. Ron stepped into the bindings of his skis, and set out. He established a good rhythm and was soon over a mile away from the cabin. They had only gotten a foot of snow out of the storm, so it didn't drift in, and he had pretty good skiing conditions. Not as easy as a groomed Cross-Country skiing trail, but he didn't have to break trail too often. After a couple of hours, he turned around and skied back in his own tracks, this was much easier, and he was home in little over an hour. Since he was nice and tired by now, he went inside. Lucky was glad, because he had it even tougher than Ron did - he didn't have nice smooth skis to glide home with, and was forced to bound through the snow to keep up. Lucky drank almost a gallon of water, and ate a whole bowl of dog food. Anne made Ron some hot cocoa, and he had to admit it hit the spot. Roy got a cup too, even though he stayed inside where it was warm. Just about then, Lucky nuzzled Ron, and made it clear he needed to water some trees. Ron opened the door, let Lucky out, and shut the door. 5 minutes later, he heard some scratching on the door, and Lucky was standing there like "What took you so long?"

Ron checked his kit, and realizing he had room in his daybag, and it didn't weight that much, he added his Whisperlite Multifuel Stove. He filled the 11oz bottle full of avgas, which would give him over an hour of boil time, and would operate below freezing, which was a good feature around there. He grabbed 6 pouches of hot cocoa mix, and put them in the kit as well. Before sticking it in his pack, he enclosed the fuel bottle in 2 gallon-sized Ziploc bags just in case it leaked, and packed the stove in its bag. The Coca mix, and a couple of chocolate bars, went in another Ziploc bag. Ron thought about packing some food for Lucky, but realized that if he fed Lucky before they left, he would be OK for at least 24 hours as long as he had enough water. The tent he carried was just big enough for him and Lucky, and would hold up to an Alaskan Blizzard, and it was smaller than his mummy bag which compressed to a size just bigger than Roy's fist when he rolled it up and stuffed it in

its compression sack. The tent, mummy bag, and stove with fuel added maybe 7 pounds to his pack, but the 3 items meant the difference between waiting out a blizzard in relative comfort vs. freezing his butt off, even if he could build a fire. Between the gallon Camelback and everything in his daybag, it weighed maybe 20-25 pounds. His fanny pack weighed maybe 10 pounds, and his shoulder holsters and guns maybe another 5-10. His entire load was between 35 and 40 pounds, which was a walk in the park for him, since he carried almost half of that wherever he went. He decided to ask Roy if he could put a handful of doggie treats in his bag to keep Lucky happy if not well fed. Roy thought that was a good idea, especially when Ron told him that he was building a kit in case he got stranded by a blizzard while out cross-country skiing. Roy thought it was such a good idea that he added their mummy bags and a tent to their day bags. He figured the 3 of them could share a stove since Roy and Anne weren't likely to go out skiing without Ron. Roy did add a small pot to his kit, and filled the pot full of dehydrated soup mixes that were heavy on calories and carbs. He added a Ziploc bag full of caribou jerky, which would give them some extra protein. Ron's and Roy's packs were within a couple of pounds of each other. Anne's pack was lighter because all she had was her mummy bag and an EMT first aid kit in a soft case, plus the gallon size Camelback bladder. Some may have thought that these kits were overkill, except they knew from experience that winter storms came up fast in Alaska without much warning, and if they were more than a mile from the house when the storm hit, they might not be able to get safely home, and would be better off taking the time to set up their shelters instead of trying to run for home. Ron thought that if they were all stranded together, he could set up the tents nose to nose, and use a piece of tarp to connect the two tents and act as a windbreak between them so they could cook without the wind blowing the stove out, and stay reasonably warm since Ron carried a 2-man dome tent, and Roy carried a 3-man dome tent for the extra room.

The next day Roy and Ron replaced the pontoons on the DeHaviland with the skis. It took most of the day, but was made much easier by using the chain hoist to pick up the plane. With the huge gear reduction, Ron thought he would have to pull on the chain forever, then finally the plane groaned and lifted off the hangar floor. They unbolted the pontoons, and bolted the skis in their place. Right before dinner, they lowered the plane back to the hangar floor. With the skis, the wheels weren't retractable, and always made contact with the ground. Even with the extra drag, taking off with skis required a much shorter runway than taking off with pontoons, and he gained 500 pounds of cargo capacity.

Since the weather was nice the next day, they went cross-country skiing; Ron kept the pace slow in deference to his Mom & Dad, but still made several miles by the time they got home later that afternoon. While they were out, Ron spotted several likely trails to check out and marked the intersection of the trails as a waypoint in his GPS. When he got home, he looked at the new trail with his Topo software, and the trail looked fairly flat, and was about 1 mile long. He marked the endpoints of the trail in his GPS as well, so he could check his progress along the trail, and navigate easily. He spotted several clearings where he could practice his .22 Golf and simulate the shooting stages of Biathlon. He had his .22 rifle by now, but

couldn't justify the weight when he was going long-distance. He thought he could use the 1-mile circuit in front of the cabin and set up a shooting stage in front of the cabin if he wanted to do some serious biathlon training. Lucky was seriously considering a name change request to Tired Old Dog, since he accompanied Ron on all his skiing treks, and was Dog Tired by the time he got home. Roy found Sam's old doggie booties and gave them to Ron when he noticed that Lucky's paws were starting to look rough. The booties reduced the dog's traction, but they also kept the ice crystals from forming between their toes, and kept the ice and snow from tearing up their pads.

The next day, Ron put on all his gear, and wanted to check out those new trails. This time he made sure Lucky was wearing his booties. He showed his Mom & Dad where he was going on the map, and when he expected to come home. He told them not to worry if the weather got bad, and he wasn't home, since he was carrying enough stuff on him to safely wait out the storm, at least overnight. Anne told him they were going to the lake and back, so they'd be back later that afternoon. They were only going to be maybe ½ a mile from the house, so they left the bags at home. Roy still brought his fanny pack, and his shoulder holster, since he didn't go anywhere without them. They both left about the same time, and Ron was quickly out of sight of the cabin, since there hadn't been any new snow since the last time he was on this trail and he made great time. His GPS beeped when he reached the intersection of the trail, and he turned north, to follow the new trail. The going was slow, since he was breaking new trail, but it wasn't too hard, since the snow was only about a foot deep. When he got to the end of the trail, he turned around, and stopped to check Lucky's paws, and give him a drink out of his canteen. Even though it was freezing out, Lucky used quite a bit of water since his tongue was hanging out panting. Roy still had half a gallon in his Camelback, so he didn't stop to refill his canteen since that would mean firing up the stove, and all the time that took. Instead he headed back home along the trail he had just blazed. Skiing home was much easier than breaking trail, and was soon back at the intersection. Ron didn't like the looks of the clouds to the west, so he turned for home, which was just a mile or so away, and picked up the pace. He checked on Lucky, and he was keeping up, so he maintained the pace. By the time he got within sight of the cabin, it was snowing hard, but the wind wasn't blowing, so the visibility stayed good enough to keep skiing. Half an hour later, he arrived at the house, and gave Lucky a big bowl of water, and a can of dog food. He drank a bunch of water himself, and Anne made him some hot cocoa. He collapsed in the chair, then he had a talk with his Dad.

"Man that was stupid."

"Ron - what do you mean?"

"Sometimes I think I use my head just for someplace to put my hat. I checked out that new trail, blazed a new trail over 1 mile, then turned around and skied back. I never checked the weather, probably because I was facing east. Anyway, I didn't see the storm clouds until I turned back for home, and I really had to push it to make it home. Poor Lucky was just



about exhausted when we got home, and I wasn't much better. On top of that, I had no really good way to water Lucky, and I know he was dehydrated when we got home, since he drank several bowls of water when we got home. I tried to give him some water out of my canteen, but I didn't have a bowl for him to drink from. Also on the way home, the storm rolled in, and I didn't have my headlamp with me. It would have made things much better. I need a way to melt snow without having to break out my stove."

"Ron, you've got a stove underneath your canteen cup, and 3 sticks of Trioxane fuel. All you needed to do was to light 1/3 of a bar, and you could have melted several quarts of water before it ran out. All you do is put the stove on the ground, break a piece off the bar and light it with your MFS, then fill the canteen cup 1/3 water and 2/3 snow, and set it on the stove. When it's melted, pour the water into Lucky's bowl and start over. Check with your Mom, I'm sure she has an old plastic bowl you can use for water for Lucky. As far as your headlamp, you just learn these things as you go along, so don't be so hard on yourself. Also, Stop, turn around 360 degrees and check the clouds every now and then. When you got to the intersection, if you had checked the weather, you might not have gone on that new trail today, and you would have been home way before it started snowing."

"Dad, you're so smart."

"Ron, hopefully you learn stuff as you get older, the trick is to remember it, and apply it."

Ron gave his Dad a hug, then went to repack his bag. He walked into the kitchen, and asked Anne if she had a small plastic bowl he could use for Lucky's water when they were out. Anne handed him a bowl, telling Ron she overheard their conversation, and found a suitable bowl. It was an old plastic soup bowl that he had used as a small child. Somehow Ron found it fitting. He put it in his pack, and added his headlamp, then put several spare batteries in his jacket pocket in a Ziploc in case they leaked. Ron hoped next time he'd be better prepared. By now, Anne had dinner ready, and they sat down to eat. Ron was hungry, and was working on his third helping when his Mom and Dad finished eating. He studied his medical books after dinner, then went to bed. Lucky had sacked out shortly after Ron fed him, and had no intentions of getting up any time soon.

## Chapter 82 - Stranded

When the storm blew over, Ron was getting cabin fever, and decided to go cross-country skiing. The storm didn't leave a lot of snow, so they had the porch cleaned off in no time. Ron fed Lucky, then told his parents he was going out skiing, and showed them where. Roy and Anne decided to stay inside where it was warm, so Ron and Lucky headed out after Ron put on all his gear. Outside the door, he stepped into his bindings, then stepped into the fresh powder snow. The new layer of snow was only a couple of inches deep, so Ron had no problem finding his old tracks, and soon had put the cabin out of sight behind him. Instead of turning north, he continued east on the track towards the caribou hunting grounds. He lost track of time since he was admiring the winter wonderland instead of paying attention to where he was. When he finally looked at his watch, he was way past his turn-around time, so he turned back to a clearing he had spotted a mile back and made camp.

First, he cleared the snow away from where the tent would be staked down, then put the tent up and staked it down heavily in case the wind came up overnight. Once he had the tent set in, he took the displaced snow and piled it on the lower third of the tent on top of the rain fly. He knew snow was an excellent insulator, and he would stay warmer in the tent if the lower 1/3 was covered by snow. He knew that the tent couldn't stand the load if he tried to turn it into an igloo, but burying the lower 1/3 would help. He almost smacked himself for not bringing his sleeping pad, then he remembered even his small one wouldn't fit inside his day bag. He looked around outside for some conifer boughs, but no such luck. He guessed he could rough it for one night, at least he had a good mummy bag and a tent. He dug a hole in the snow in front of the tent to protect the stove from the wind, and took out the fuel bottle, and attached it to the stove. Taking out his Bic, he tried to get it to light, and realized it was too cold for the butane to work. He stuck the lighter under his jacket between the sleeve and body of his shirt in his armpit. The lighter was cold, but in a few minutes, it was warm enough to work. He pumped up the stove, and set it to the Light setting, then tried flicking his Bic again, and this time it lit. The gas stove lit off with a roar, and he started melting snow. He gave Lucky all the water he wanted, and half the doggie biscuits. He melted some more snow, filled his canteen, then filled his Camelback. Finally, right as the light was fading, he made some hot cocoa. After he was done, he turned off the stove to save fuel, and vented the pressure. He turned his LED light to the constant on position, and hung it from the center of the dome tent, and carried everything inside. Not wanting to get caribou hair all over the inside of his mummy bag, he stripped to his polypro longjohns, and laid the jacket over the top of the bag, and rolled the pants up as a pillow. He called Lucky inside, and zipped the tent closed. He turned the setting on the LED light to the single Red LED setting, and left it on to give him some light in the pitch darkness. Lucky curled right up against Ron, and soon they were fast asleep.

The next morning they were awake at first light. Ron unzipped the tent to let Lucky out, and he came back 5 minutes later and gave Ron a big doggie kiss. He got dressed quickly, then

fired up the stove to make more water for Lucky, and cocoa for him. While the snow was melting, he ate one of his chocolate bars. He laughed to himself when he remembered an old wives tale that chocolate somehow gave you zits. The truth was they were caused by hormonal fluctuations, and clogged pores. By the time he was done melting snow and making cocoa, it was fully light, and he left the stove to cool while he broke camp. He rolled up his sleeping bag and took down the tent, then stored the stove. He hoped his parents didn't worry about him. After he finished his cocoa, he finished putting everything back together and got on the trail for home. When he got within about a mile of home, he could see his parents were out looking for him, so he yelled and waved, then kept on coming as quickly as he could. He could see by the looks on their faces that they were upset, so he thought he had better head any punishment off at the pass.

"Mom, Dad - I'm sorry if I scared you, but I lost track of time, and was too far out to safely make it home before dark, but I got to try out my equipment, and it all works great."

"Ron, we're too worried to get mad at you right now, but I don't know what to do, since you did the right thing by staying put in a safe location instead of trying to make it home in the dark and maybe hurting yourself."

"Dad, would it help if I had a radio on me? I could buy a Kenwood handheld 2-meter radio with about a 5-mile range and rechargeable batteries. That way if I had to stay out overnight, I could call you and let you know I was OK."

"That would definitely beat keeping us up all night worrying about you."

"Let me call Bill and find out which model he recommends."

They walked into the house, and after Anne set everything down, walked over to Ron, gave him a big hug, and broke down crying. When he realized how badly he had scared his Mom, Ron joined her, sobbing "Mom, I'm sorry. I didn't mean to scare you. I'm OK, and I'll make sure this will never happen again."

"Ron, I thought I had lost my son. Please be more considerate from now on."

"Mom, I had no way to let you know I was OK, and like Dad said, it was better that I stayed overnight in a safe spot instead of trying to make it home in the dark."

"What about your headlamp?"

"Mom, it's risky to use it in total darkness, since it doesn't show depth well, and the snow looks like a large flat surface under artificial light. I got the headlamp in case I was caught in a snowstorm, and I was close enough to make it home safely during the day."

Ron walked over to the radio, and switched to Bill's frequency "Bill, its Ron, how do you read?"

"Ron, read you 5 by 5, what's up?"

"I need a small handheld radio that has at least 10 miles of range, and operates on 2-meters with rechargeable batteries. Any suggestions?"

"Ron, I've got an old Kenwood TH-22AT with the PB-34 battery pack and the KCS-14 charger, and a speaker mic. I can sell the whole thing for \$50.00, and I'll program it with all our frequencies. If you can get FAA approval, I have an in-vehicle cross-band repeater that you can use with the hand held. If you're within range of the plane, it will re-transmit your 2-meter signal on the 440Mhz band at up to 50 watts. Even with the plane on the ground, that's enough power to talk to just about anyone within 25-50 miles."

"I'll keep that in mind, but all I need right now is the handheld. I don't want to make a special trip; do you have any deliveries scheduled in the next couple of weeks?"

"Now that you mentioned it, several homesteaders realized they were caught short, and could use another delivery if you're up to it. Tell you what, instead of paying you your usual fee for delivery, I'll trade you the handheld and the repeater with an antenna, and I'll throw in the installation, and pay for your gas."

"Bill, I like the way you think, that way I get the radio I need, and you get the deliveries done with no cash outlay. When do you need me?"

"The weather looks pretty good tomorrow, could you be in Anchorage around 10:00am, and that should get you home by 4:00pm?"

"Works for me. See ya tomorrow."

"Dad, did you hear, Bill's trading me a delivery tomorrow for the handheld and a repeater for the plane. I really don't need the repeater right now, but it will come in handy if I do any guiding, since I can have radio contact even if I'm away from the plane."

"Sounds like a deal Ron, just make sure you're careful tomorrow. If it even starts to look bad, set down somewhere and call us on the radio."

"OK Dad."

Ron checked, and his DSL connection was working, so he sent an e-mail to the FAA office in Anchorage, requesting permission to install a 50-watt 440 band cross-band repeater in the plane. He went on to explain what the repeater was, what it did, and that it wouldn't be

connected to any of the FAA-required aviation radios in the plane. He sent it urgent with a return receipt requested. 2 hours later he received approval, and called Bill.

“Bill, I’ll need a second battery installed in the plane, say about a 20Ah battery on a separate circuit, but charged by the plane’s electrical system, so I can disconnect the plane’s battery and still have power for the repeater.”

“Ron, I’ve got a 12vdc 40Ah gel cell here that I’ll add to the original deal for free. It’s smart to put a radio like that on a separate battery so you can always start the plane. You’ll love the antenna, it’s a 5/8 wave antenna, and it will work great since it’s a Rubber Ducky design so it’s totally airworthy. I’ll have everything tested and ready for you tomorrow afternoon when you get done. If there’s enough time, I’ll have him install the repeater, battery and antenna, as well as a switch to shut off the repeater when you’re in the hangar, since it draws some power even when it’s not being used. See you tomorrow.”

Ron set his alarm for 0600 tomorrow, since he needed to take the seats out of the plane. They sat down to eat dinner, and Ron told his Mom he was flying tomorrow, and he had to be out early so he could remove the seats, and still be to Anchorage by 10:00. Anne said she’d make some more raisin bran muffins after dinner. After dinner, Ron studied his books, then went to bed early.

At 0600 the next morning, he was up and dressed quickly. His mom handed him a couple of bran muffins and a thermos of coffee, and gave him a hug and kiss. Roy prayed over him for a minute, then he was outside. He didn’t need his snowshoes since he had kept the path to the hangar clear using the snow blower. He opened the hangar door, and opened the plane’s rear door, and grabbed his tool kit to remove the rear seats. 15 minutes later, they were on the hangar floor out of the way. He closed and locked the door, put his tools up, and walked around the plane checking everything. He got in the cockpit and started the engine. It was stubborn since it was just a few degrees above freezing, but finally it fired, and he performed the rest of his pre-flight checks while the engine warmed up. He entered the waypoint for Anchorage into his GPS, then checked the engine temp. He was good to go, and taxied out of the hangar and onto the snow. Then he realized he had little or no directional control on skis since he had no rudders on the skis, so he tried to steer with the nose wheel and he had some steering control, but he’d have to watch his throttle settings, or the plane would turn to the right from the torque of the engine. He kept the rudder over hard left until he reached the lake. It was frozen solid and at least 6 feet thick plus a foot of snow, so it would easily handle the weight of the plane. He taxied to the end of the lake, and turned upwind by unloading the rudder, and the engine torque turned the plane easily to the right. He set the plane up for take-off, and gunned the throttle. The plane started twisting to the right, so he added more left rudder. As the plane found its head, he found the nose turning left, so he eased the rudder back to a more normal setting. He reached 85 knots with over half the lake left. Not one to look a gift horse in the mouth, he pulled back on the yoke, and he practically jumped into the air. As soon as he cleared the ridge, he turned for Anchorage, and called

Bill. “Bill, this is Ron, I’m in the air en route to Anchorage, ETA...” He looked at his GPS, and it said he was 1.5 hours out of Anchorage at his present speed. “ETA is oh 9 thirty.”

“Ron, Roger, will relay ETA of oh 9 thirty to delivery driver in Anchorage. See ya when you get back to Allakaket. Keep me posted. Over and Out.”

Ron switched the radio back to Anchorage Control, since that would be his next contact in a little over an hour. He was amazed at the airspeed he had at this throttle setting, then remembered he didn’t have the pontoons on anymore. They must also have a lot of aerodynamic drag as well as weight. He was flying 30 knots faster at his cruise setting without the pontoons. He remembered there was no gear to lower with the skis, since the gear wasn’t retractable. He also remembered that he only had minimal nose wheel steering with this setup. He would set up the same approach that he used before, and remembered he needed to land light and pancake the landing on skis, either on wheels or on the skis, since they weren’t as forgiving as landing on water with the huge pontoons. About an hour later, he called Anchorage Control, and they gave him immediate clearance, and the gate number where the delivery crew would be waiting. Half an hour later, he performed a textbook landing, and coasted to a stop at the end of the runway. He remembered with the icy conditions he had no brakes, and kept his speed low. Once he got onto the taxiways, the road looked dryer, and he experimented with his brakes. They worked, but he realized they wouldn’t stop him in a STOL situation. Finally he taxied up to the correct gate, and the delivery truck was waiting for him. It was a relatively light load, and took 15 minutes to load. He verified that he had all the homesteads plotted as waypoints in his GPS, then mentally made up his route, and plotted the waypoints in sequence, and stored the route. He signed for the delivery, taxied to the pumps, and topped off the tanks with Avgas, and taxied to the runway. He received immediate clearance, and when he turned onto the active runway, he made another call informing the tower he was ready to take off, they acknowledged, and he double-checked the plane was set up to take off, then shoved the throttle to FULL, and was airborne less than halfway down the runway. He verified the GPS was set up for the first waypoint of his route, and arrived at the homestead a little over an hour later. It only took a few minutes to unload, and he was back in the air. He was finished with his deliveries by noon, so he called Bill and told him he was on his way to Allakaket.

Half an hour later, he called the Allakaket Control, and received permission to land. Remembering he was landing on snow again, he made a nice gentle landing, and taxied to the pumps to top off his tanks, then Bill showed up with the radios. 5 minutes later, the mechanic showed up, and Bill showed him what he needed to do. He said it would take less than an hour, and he’d call Bill on the radio when he was done. Bill asked Ron if he wanted to eat lunch. Since he only had 3 muffins for breakfast, he was hungry, and readily agreed. They went to the Moose Café, and ordered the daily special (Mooseburger, fries and a coke). Bill showed Ron how to work the radio, and Ron was impressed with the programming job he had done. He even programmed a channel for the cross-band repeater in the plane, with a CTS tone to keep the repeater from activating if there were radio traffic on that frequency, so

it would save power. He told Ron he had programmed a courtesy tone onto the repeater, so he would know when it was OK to transmit. Ron asked him about the speaker mike set-up, and Bill explained the Ni-Cad batteries wouldn't tolerate cold, and had to be kept warm, so you put the radio in your shirt pocket, and clipped the speaker mike onto your jacket so you could hear and transmit without getting the battery cold. As he switched frequencies, Ron was pleasantly surprised that the memory channels had names associated with it. The in-plane repeater channel was labeled "Plane" and the channel with his home frequency was labeled "Home". He explained that the in-plane repeater transmitted on the Allakaket common 440Mhz - band frequency, so he should only use the repeater for emergency or urgent calls, since it was a monitored and reserved frequency. Ron told Bill that if he ever heard him on that frequency, he could rest assured that it was either urgent or an emergency, unless he said "Radio Test" right after his name. Bill reminded him not to do radio tests outside of business hours, and to limit his tests to 1 per week. Ron said he probably wouldn't use the repeater except during hunting season, and only if he were away from the plane during an emergency. He asked Bill if he could locate another handheld radio and an in-plane repeater for Jim, and a couple of FRS/GMRS radios for his parents. If his Dad was out and about when he was gone, he might need to get in touch with Anne, or vice versa. Bill thought that was an excellent idea, since Roy never went more than a mile or so away from the cabin without Anne anymore.

After about 55 minutes, the mechanic called Bill and said that the radio was installed and ready to test. Ron switched the radio to "Plane" and pressed the PTT button on the mike. "Ron calling Tower, Radio Check."

"Allakaket Tower, read you, you're way strong and over-modulating big time."

"Ron, move the mike away from your mouth or talk more quietly."

Ron moved the mike ½" away from his mouth, and tried again.

"OK Ron, the overmod is gone, but you're pegging my signal strength meter."

Bill asked Ron for the microphone. "Tower this is Bill, we're testing a 50 watt cross-band repeater in a plane less than a mile away from you, please turn your receiver sensitivity down."

"Roger Bill, that explains why I'm hearing him on the 2-meter and the 70cm radios at the same time."

"Tower, this is Bill again, radio check how do you read me?"

"Read you 5 by 5 full quieting."

Bill handed the mike back to Ron. “Tower this is Ron, how do you copy?”

“Ron, I read you 5x5 full quieting.”

Bill took the mike back, “Tower, this concludes radio test, please reset sensitivity back to original settings, Over and Out.”

“Ron that in-plane repeater doesn’t have a power setting, so it always transmits on full power, which is good for emergencies. It draws about 2 amps on receive, and about 12 on transmit.” They got up, Bill paid the tab and left a generous tip, and they drove back to the plane. “Bill, there’s no rush on Jim’s plane, but if you could get the FRS/GMRS radios and a rapid charger for my mom and dad, I’d appreciate it - make sure it’s a DC charger, since I don’t want to have to buy an inverter.”

Ron looked in the box, and the rapid charger had been rewired for DC input by someone. It was kind of stupid to invert DC, then convert the AC back to DC to charge batteries, so everyone in Allakaket paid Bill to convert their “wall wort” transformers to DC power, since almost no one had AC power in their cabins. Bill had installed AC power in the Inn as a convenience to travelers, and to run the kitchen equipment, but it ran off a generator/battery bank/inverter set up. He was going to get solar panels, but they were too expensive when you factored in the shipping costs. When they got to the plane, the mechanic showed Ron what he had done. Bill’s gel cell was actually a 12vdc 60Ah battery, instead of a 40Ah, but it was the same size and weight as the 40Ah. The mechanic had wired a separate circuit to charge the battery for the repeater, and an on/off switch for the repeater, to save power when the plane was in the hangar, or when he wasn’t using the repeater. He also installed a second switch with a huge relay that would enable him to use the extra battery power to start the plane in an emergency, or if it were really cold out. He’d also installed a noise filter between the battery and the radio, to eliminate all sources of noise from the power line, and installed a fuse panel with ATO type fuses on the positive and negative leads. The antenna was permanently mounted to the roof, and wasn’t going anywhere. Ron thanked him, and got in the plane to leave, then remembered something, got out, shook Bill’s hand and thanked him for everything.

He climbed back in, and checked that everyone was clear, then started the motor and taxied to the lake. 5 minutes later he was airborne to Allakaket. He used the aircraft’s radio to call ahead and tell his Dad he would be home in an hour. 59 minutes later, he made a textbook landing, and taxied up to the open hangar doors. When he shut down, he made sure all the switches were off, including the Radio repeater. He asked his mom and dad to come out to the hangar, and explained what the mechanic had done, and what frequency the repeater broadcast and received on. Ron knew that the common frequency was already programmed into the cabin radio. They went back into the house, and Ron showed them his new radio, and explained how it worked, then told them he had ordered each of them an FRS/GMRS radio so they could keep in touch when he was gone, if Roy decided to go to the lake or the



garden without Anne. Anne hugged her son, and told him that was very thoughtful of him. Ron told her that his radio transmitted at 5 watts, so if he had line of sight, he could talk to them from anywhere on their land. Their FRS/GMRS radios had a mile or 2 range on the FRS side, and 5-10 miles on the GMRS side. He said that Bill should have them in a week or so. If Anne left her radio turned on and plugged into the charger, she could use it like a base station and monitor it in case Roy needed to call her. He plugged the radio's charger into his battery bank and stuck the radio into the charger base. The green LED told him that the radio was charging.

## Chapter 83 - Biathlon

The next morning Ron got up and wanted to try out his new radio. He told his Mom and Dad he was going skiing, and to keep the radio on, because he wanted to check the range of the radio. Lucky looked like he really didn't want to go when Ron put his booties on. Ron put all his gear on, and opened the door, then stepped into the binders of his skis, and skied toward the east. After a couple of miles, he stopped and turned the radio on, then keyed the mike "Ron to base, radio check".

Roy answered the radio "Loud and clear Ron, talk to you later."

Ron turned the radio off, and skied another mile, and did another radio check, he kept that up until he was 5 miles away from the house, and Roy still said he was reading him loud and clear. He was about as far as he would normally get from the house, so he saw no reason to go farther. He turned his radio on again, and told his dad he was on his way home. Gliding in his own fresh tracks, he made better time on the way back in, then he noticed Lucky seemed to get tired. Since his Camelback was over half full, he stopped, took Lucky's bowl out, and filled it from his canteen, and gave him several doggie biscuits. The water and biscuits seemed to revive Lucky, so Ron put everything back together, and glided home the last mile. He was home way before dark, so he decided to try out his .22 rifle. First he gave Lucky all the water he could drink, and fed him. Lucky took a nap on the bearskin, and Ron picked up his rifle and a bag with a dozen orange golf balls. Once outside, and far enough away from the cabin for safety, he slung the rifle, and started tossing golf balls as far as he could into the snow. They fell in a random pattern from 50-100 yards away.

Loading the 10-round magazine from a box of CCI mini-mags, he stuck the mag in the magazine well of the rifle and cycled the action. He slowed his breathing and pulse, then aimed at the 50-yd golf ball through the peep sight that the gunsmith had installed. As the sights lined up, he touched the trigger, and the golf ball jumped. He aimed at the 75-yd golf ball, and seconds later he was 2-2. By the time he was finished, he had gone 9-10 with a near-miss at a golf ball that was around 100 yards away. Ron didn't realize that shooting golf balls at 100 yards was the equivalent of the shooting skills necessary to shoot well in Biathlon. Ron didn't know if he skied fast enough to compete, but he was pretty sure he could hold his own at the steel plates. He put his rifle up, and resumed shooting with his Ruger 22/45. That was much more challenging, and his best run was 5/15 at 50-100 yards. He thought that if the balls were 25-50 yards out, he might hit more of them, since the red dot in his Optima sight was bigger than the golf ball at any distance greater than 50 yards. When he finished, he trudged out in the snow to retrieve the golf balls, and was really tired when he got back inside the door. He put his stuff back up, and remembered to put the radio in the charger base. He cleaned his guns and reloaded the mags, then hung the shoulder holster on the peg above his bed, and the fanny pack on the peg next to it. The daybag was too heavy to hang on a hook, so he set it on the floor below them.

The next day, Bill called, and told Ron the FRS/GMRS radios were in Anchorage, and Jim wanted to come up for a visit. Ron told Bill he'd go to Anchorage and pick Jim up on the way home.

"Mom, Dad, Jim's coming for a visit, and the radios are in. I need to fly to Anchorage tomorrow to pick them up, and I'll pick up Jim on the way home."

Roy and Anne were glad they were able to see Jim again, it had been several months. Evidently, his new medication was working better. Ron called Bill back, and asked him what time they'd have the delivery ready, and when Jim would be ready to go, so they'd have maximum daylight to spend time with him. Bill said the driver could be there at 0900 tomorrow, since he didn't need his delivery truck, and Jim would be ready by 1000. Ron said that his flight time from Anchorage to Allakaket was an hour and a half without the pontoons, so tell Jim he'd be there between 10:30 and 11:00 so he wouldn't be waiting too long. He'd call the tower when he was close, so if Jim could monitor the tower frequency tomorrow, he'd know when he was coming. Bill said he'd tell Jim and signed off.

Ron told his parents that the radios would be in tomorrow, and after he got them programmed and charged, they would be good to go.

He spent the rest of the day studying, and Anne gave him another quiz. She was starting to wonder why she bothered, he never scored less than 90%, she thought he had a Photographic Memory. After dinner, he read his Bible and went to sleep early so he could be in Anchorage at 0900.

The next morning, he got up at 0600, and was dressed by 0615. Anne made breakfast since he had time. They ate quickly, and he was out to the hangar by 0650. He did a quick walk-around, and started the engine to let it warm up while he performed his pre-flight checklist. He plugged in his GPS, and entered the waypoint for Anchorage. Once the motor was up to temp, he nudged the throttle and taxied out to the lake. He must have gotten used to flying on skis, since the nose of the plane wasn't wiggling all over the place. He did the same rudder trick to get the plane's nose into the wind, and double-checked that the plane was set-up to take off. He advanced the throttle to full and was soon in the air. As soon as he cleared the ridge he turned toward Anchorage. An hour later, he called Anchorage control for landing instructions. That early in the morning, the pattern was empty, so they told him to fly straight on in, and told him which gate his delivery truck would be waiting at. After he landed and taxied to the correct gate, he chopped the throttle to idle, and as soon as the prop stopped spinning, the driver opened the passenger side door and handed him a box with 2 FRS/GMRS radios, the dual-port rapid charger and the owner's manuals. Ron thanked him, signed for the order, and as soon as he was clear, turned the plane and taxied back to the runway. As he taxied, he set the plane up for take-off, called the tower, and got permission to take off as soon as he made the runway. He punched in the coordinates for Allakaket, and turned onto the runway. As soon as he was in the air, he turned to head

directly to Allakaket, and called the tower when he was 15 minutes out for landing instructions. Bill and Jim heard the broadcast, and started heading toward the runway. He landed on the lake, and taxied up to the “airport” then shut down. As soon as the prop stopped, Jim got in, and threw a couple of boxes in the back. Once he was safely aboard and belted in, Ron restarted the motor, and turned to taxi to the lake. Jim noticed the new black box, and asked Ron what it was. “Gramps, I’ll explain in the air, OK?”

He taxied to the end of the lake, while setting the plane up to take-off and programming the GPS to fly home. Jim noticed how smoothly he was handling the plane on skis, since most beginner pilots have serious trouble with skis due to the lack of control. He admired Ron’s “tap dancing” with the rudder pedals to keep the plane pointed straight. Once he settled down to taxi to the end of the lake, he saw Ron was pretty much leaving the pedals alone, since he was taxiing at low speed in a straight line. When they got to the end of the lake, he was impressed by Ron’s rudder trick to get the plane pointed into the wind. He unloaded the left rudder, and the engine torque snapped the plane smartly into the wind, and he recovered exactly facing into the wind. He called the tower and received permission to take off, and shoved the throttle to full, while adding left rudder to compensate. After a brief bumpy take-off roll, the plane wanted to fly, so Ron pulled back on the yoke, and the plane jumped into the air. He held the climb until he cleared the ridge, then climbed at max cruise to 2,000 feet. Once he was at altitude, he explained the recent modifications to his Grandpa.

“Gramps - I’ve been trying to practice for Biathlon when the weather cooperates. The other day, I didn’t pay attention to how much daylight I had left, and had to stay out overnight. I had a complete kit including a 2-man dome tent, my mummy bag, and stove, so Lucky and I were fine. As you can imagine, Mom and Dad were freaking out. When I got home, I apologized to Mom & Dad for scaring them, and Mom was upset since I couldn’t tell them I was alright, so I called Bill, and he had this 2-meter handitalkie laying around, and he traded me a delivery trip for the radio and all the accessories, plus a 50-watt 70cm (440Mhz band) in-plane cross-band repeater, the antenna, a 60Ah battery, and the installation. He even paid for the gas for my trip. The repeater is pre-programmed with a CTS tone, and retransmits my 5-watt handitalkie transmissions from 2-meter to the 70cm (440 MHz) band, and boosts the power to 50 watts. It transmits on the 440MHz Emergency frequency, so If I have an emergency, and I’m within 5 miles of the plane, but can’t get to the radio in the plane, I can reach a lot farther with the repeater than with the little 5-watt 2-meter handitalkie.”

“Ron, that sounds like an excellent idea.”

“Good, because I bought one for you. Bill said he could get it installed in your Cessna by spring, so if you’re out fishing, and have an emergency, you’re just a radio call away from help, since the radio will transmit 25-50 miles, even on the ground.”

“I wish it would have the range of the aircraft radio.”

“I know Gramps, but the FAA won’t allow you to have a remote repeater attached to your plane’s radio, in case it keys by mistake, and you keep someone else from using that frequency in an emergency.”

“Right, I forgot about that - can you afford all this?”

“Gramps, relax, I made almost 60 thousand dollars this hunting season, and Bill has me booked solid for next season. I’m a 14 year old kid, and I’m making more money than some guys with families to support. So I can easily afford it.”

“Holy Cow - I didn’t know you were raking in the dough like that?”

“I was flying 2 trips a day for the entire summer at \$500 a pop plus tips - you do the math.”

“You were making \$1,000 per day. Wow - I wish I was making that kind of money when I was flying.”

“Gramps, if you take inflation into account, your 20-30 thousand 20 years ago was probably equivalent, it sounds like a lot more, but money isn’t worth what it once was. Back then and nice house was maybe 30 Thousand instead of over 100 thousand.”

“You’re right Ron. How’s the GPS working out?”

“I’m saving literally hours per week, and almost 1/3 of my fuel bill, since I know exactly when I need to descend, and can fly exact headings from stop to stop.”

“Wow, 1/3 of your fuel bill means a lot more money in your pocket.”

“The GPS has already paid for itself several times over. OK, we’re getting close to home - I need to call in.”

“Dad, Its Ron, we’re about 20 minutes out, can you get the hangar open?”

“Roger, see you in 20 son.”

Jim was impressed; the GPS told him exactly how far away they were from Ron’s place, and exactly how long it would take at their present speed. He wished he’d have had this “newfangled gadget” when he was flying. 20 minutes later, they were ready to land at the lake. Jim noticed that Ron was coming in just above stall speed, then realized the skis had no brakes since he was landing on snow, and could easily slide the entire length of the lake. Ron touched down light as a feather, and slid to a stop 50 feet from the edge of the lake, then turned the plane and taxied up to and into the hangar before shutting everything down, including the repeater. When Ron got out, he helped Jim with his stuff, and grabbed the box

with the radios.

When they walked inside the house, Anne met Jim and gave him a big hug; Roy shook hands with Jim, and offered him some coffee. Jim said he could have a small glass, but he had to watch his caffeine since it could interfere with his medicine.

“Ron, I’ve got a surprise for you, Bill mentioned you were interested in Biathlon, so I did an Internet search, and located a guy in Anchorage who runs the local club, and he sent me a copy of the rules so you could set up your own training course out here. From what I read, the course is supposed to be 5km long, with a shooting stage at the end of each lap. Get a load of this, the targets are set at 50M, and the prone targets are only 4.5 cm across, and the standing targets are 11.5cm.”

“Gramps, I’ve been shooting golf balls from the standing position from 50-100 yards. 50 meters at a 1.7 inch target is a walk in the park especially from the prone, a 4.5 inch target at that same distance standing is even easier.”

“Yeah, but they’re doing it after skiing a 5km loop flat out. That gets your heart racing, then you need to shoot at little itty bitty targets while your rifle is making figure-8’s the size of a Volkswagen.”

“Point taken Gramps. Can you get in touch with this guy and get the Jr. competitor’s lap times from slowest to fastest, so I know what I have to shoot for - so to speak.”

“Ron, 5km is almost 3 miles. I’ll bet that by the time you’ve skied 3 miles you can’t hit the broad side of a barn. Seems to me the first thing you need to do is build up your stamina so you can ski 3 miles flat out then actually shoot. Not only that, but if I remember correctly the Junior Biathlon distances are either a 10km sprint, or a 15km Individual event, and you shoot once per lap. If you want to set up a course here, I’d suggest using your GPS to plot 2 3/8-mile legs close enough together that the turns are an 1/8 mile each, for a total of a mile lap. 3 laps around it will be close enough to 5km for practice. Your other alternative is an out and back track 1.5 miles long and shoot every time you get back in front of the cabin.”

“The out and back would be easier to set up. Let’s try that first.”

In the boxes Jim brought were not only the rules and regulations, but also the guy’s e-mail address if he had any questions. Ron sent him an e-mail requesting a supplier for a set of Biathlon targets with a remote reset, one of the small, and one of the large targets. He surfed the internet, and found a site that sold used equipment, and ordered a used double-shoulder sling that he could fit to the 10/22. With that out of the way, Jim, Roy, and Anne sat down to talk while Ron programmed the FRS/GMRS radios so they could talk to each other. He wished his 2-meter radio could talk to the radios, but they operated on different frequencies. When he was finished programming the radios, he plugged the charger into his battery bank,

and stuck the radios into the charger. That finished, Ron told his parents he was going to go out and set up a skiing track. He took his GPS, and set a start point out behind the cabin, then skied east until the GPS said he had traveled 1.5 miles east, then he stopped, marked the spot as a waypoint, and jammed a big stick into the ground with a piece of bright yellow fabric on it. He turned around, and skied back home. Jim was right; he was winded when he got home. He plopped down on a chair, and tried to catch his breath. Jim said “and that was only after 1 lap - imagine doing 3 of those back to back in a race, and still having to shoot.” Ron decided then and there that Biathlon was for the Birds. He’d much rather stay put and shoot at 600 yards, then have to run a mini-marathon, and still have to shoot. He still wanted the targets just to practice, but unless he got a lot more stamina, he was going to stick to the Shooting Team, and forget about becoming a World-class Biathlete.

Ron sat down to visit with his Grandpa for a while, and a couple of hours later, Jim said he had to be getting home, so Ron flew him back to Allakaket. On the way back Jim told him, “Ron, I’m real proud of you, you’ve settled down and become a very good pilot. It took me a long time to figure out flying with skis, and I know you haven’t done maybe 3 or 4 landings and take-offs with skis, but you seem to have it figured out. I miss flying, but I know I did the right thing now - flying commercial is a young man’s profession, especially bush flying since it demands such a high degree of concentration, eye-hand coordination, and extraordinary vision. I can still fly, but I don’t want to fly with passengers again. If something happened, I couldn’t live with it. I really love flying with you, since I can relax and enjoy the flight, instead of thinking about everything else. Maybe this spring before you get busy, I’ll fly up to your place, and we can go fishing.”

“I’d like that Gramps, thanks for coming up to see us; I know my Mom and Dad really missed you.”

When he got close to Allakaket, Ron called the tower, and was given immediate clearance to land, since no one was around. Right after he touched down, he noticed Jim was slumped over in his seat unconscious. He grabbed the radio “Mayday, Mayday, Mayday - I have a medical emergency, Jim’s unconscious. I just landed and I’m taxiing in - have the Doc waiting.” Ron did what he could for Jim while he taxied as quickly as possible to the airport. He loosened Jim’s collar, and tipped his head back so he could breathe easier. As soon as the plane stopped, he shut down, unbuckled, and gave Jim a quick assessment. He was unconscious, with no pulse or respiration, so he started CPR. 5 minutes later, Bill’s Jeep drove up with the Doc inside. They ran over, and while Ron kept up CPR, the doc did a more thorough evaluation. What he heard through his stethoscope wasn’t good. The two men grabbed Jim and threw him into the back of the Jeep, and tore off to the clinic. Ron wanted to be with his Gramps, but had the presence of mind to fill up the tanks and prep the plane for immediate take off just in case he needed to be evacuated to Anchorage. He turned the plane around, and Bill’s jeep came back for him.

“Bill, I prepped the plane in case Jim needed to be air evacuated to Anchorage.”

“Ron, I don’t know how to tell you this, but Jim just died. I thought you’d prefer to hear it from me instead of the Doctor. You did all you could, but the blood clot broke loose, and totally obstructed his heart. You were working on a dead man. I want you to stay with me tonight, and tomorrow we’ll fly back to your house to pick up your folks.

“Bill, he was just talking to me a minute ago, I can’t believe he’s gone.”

“Ron, unfortunately one of the side effects of the drugs he was on is that sometimes it actually causes a massive stroke or a fatal heart attack. A massive fatal MI is actually the best outcome of the two. He’s in heaven right now, and he’s feeling no more pain. He could have had a massive stroke, and survived in a vegetative state. That’s no way to live. I doubt if he felt anything, and was probably unconscious seconds after it happened. The doc said he never regained consciousness, so I’m sure he died peacefully.”

“Bill, we were just talking about how he loved to fly, and hopefully he could go fishing with me next spring.”

“Ron, Jim told me how much he loved flying with you, and how proud he was of you. Imagine a 14-year old flying commercial, and doing a better job than most pilots who have been at it for decades. Jim left some letters for you with me just in case, and a copy of his will. I think it best that we have the memorial service tomorrow right after we land with your mom and dad. I need to call your folks and tell them. I assume you want to be there?”

“Of course Bill - let’s go.”

They drove to Bill’s office, and Ron sat down while Bill broke the news to Roy and Anne, then Ron got on the air. He remembered they were on the air, so instead of breaking down and crying with his mom, he held back and said he was doing OK, and he’d see them first thing tomorrow. Bill got back on the radio, and told them to pack enough clothes for a few days, and to bring Lucky, since Ron would need a friend. When they got off the air, Ron gave Bill a bear hug and cried his eyes out.

Finally when he came up for air, Ron asked Bill if he could see Jim one last time. Bill called the doctor, and was told it would be fine to bring Ron over, since they weren’t going to do an autopsy, and the body was intact. Bill thanked God for small favors, then they walked over to the clinic. Jim was still laying on the examining table, and everything but his face was covered with a sheet. Ron walked up, held Jim’s hand, whispered “See you later Gramps”, then kissed him on the cheek. He walked out a minute later, and Bill was there waiting for him. “Bill he looked so peaceful, almost like he was asleep, but when I kissed his cheek, I new he was gone.”

“Ron, I need to make an announcement at the Moose Grill, you can come if you like, or you can stay in my office. All the well-wishers might be hard to take right now, but I’ll respect



your wishes.”

“It’s OK Bill, let’s go - they need to know too.”

They walked into the Moose Café/Grill, and Bill stood in the middle of the room. “I have some bad news. Half an hour ago, Jim Anderson passed away from a massive heart attack. The memorial service will be in the chapel at noon tomorrow for those who wish to attend.”

Bill and Ron walked back into Bill’s office, and sat down. He handed Ron New King James Bible, and asked him to pick out some verses he’d like Bill to read at the service tomorrow. Ron knew Bill was trying to keep him busy, but he was OK with Jim’s death. Like Bill said, the alternative was really no life. He told Bill that his favorite passage was the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm. Bill thought it appropriate, and asked Ron to come up with 3 more.

Re 14:13 'Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.'" "Yes," says the Spirit, "that they may rest from their labors, and their works follow them."

Jn 5:24-29 24 "Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life.

25 "Most assuredly, I say to you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God; and those who hear will live.

26 "For as the Father has life in Himself, so He has granted the Son to have life in Himself,

27 "and has given Him authority to execute judgment also, because He is the Son of Man.

28 "Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice

29 "and come forth--those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation.”

1Co 15:51-55 51 “Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed--

52 in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.

53 For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.

54 So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: "Death is swallowed up in victory."

55 "O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?"

Ron showed his selections to Bill who smiled and nodded approvingly. Roy and Anne had done a good job educating Ron, and he had an excellent knowledge of Scripture for a 14-yr old. Bill asked Ron if he’d rather talk or read. “Bill, if it’s all the same to you, I just want to read the Bible for a while. Call me when you’re ready for dinner.”

Bill worked on his sermon and eulogy for tomorrow's memorial service. Around 5:00, he told Ron that they needed to walk over to the inn to eat dinner, since they served promptly at 5:00. Ron closed the Bible reverently, and got up. They walked silently to the Inn, and sat down at the dinner table without saying a word. Bill said a simple grace, then the food was put on the table, and conversation resumed as they passed the food. Except for conversation necessary to fill his plate with food, Ron was absolutely silent. After they ate, Ron read for a while, and then asked where he was going to sleep. Bill said they already had a room reserved for him at the Inn, so he went to the front desk and retrieved his key, said goodnight, and went to bed.

## Chapter 84 - Funeral for A Friend

The next morning, Ron and Bill ate breakfast quietly, then Bill drove him out to the plane, Ron did a thorough walk-around, then they got in and after pre-flighting the plane, he started the motor and let it warm up while he entered the waypoint for home. Bill was worried about Ron, since he seemed to be doing everything robotically, but as long as he was being careful, he didn't say anything. Once the engine was warmed up, Ron turned on the radio and requested permission to take-off, then taxied to the downwind end of the lake, and turned the plane into the wind and took off. They didn't say a word to each other during the whole flight, and 20 minutes before they arrived, Ron called his Dad and asked him to open the hangar door. Ron made a textbook landing and taxied right up to the hangar door, and inside. Once he shut down, they got out, and Ron made sure everything was off before he went into the house. The first person he saw was his mom, and Ron ran to her and gave her a big hug.

"I'm sorry Mom. I couldn't save Gramps." Bill realized that even though he had a lot of grown-up responsibilities, Ron was still a kid. Roy walked over to the two of them and joined in the group hug.

Finally when they caught their breath, Bill looked at Ron and told him in a stern voice "Ron, I talked to the doctor, and he told me there wasn't anything you could have done anyway - Jim was dead before you could do anything. Even a doctor could have done nothing for him, the coronary artery was totally blocked, and no blood was circulating even with the CPR. Even a massive dosage of a clot busting drug would have taken too long to work, and he still would have died. God decided that he wanted Jim in Heaven with him, and you're going to need to accept that - You'll see him again, I'm sure of it."

Anne knelt down and held her son. "Ron, I talked to the Doc last night after Bill called. What he's telling you is true. There was absolutely nothing you could have done to save him."

Ron looked into his Mom's eyes, and realized she was telling the truth. "I know Mom, but I miss Gramps, and I want him back."

"I know son, I miss him too." Roy gathered his family into his arms, and prayed "God, we need you right now, please send your Spirit to comfort us, and protect us under your wings." Bill was praying quietly for Roy's family. He had been through several deaths in the community, and even when the deceased was elderly and a Christian, it was hard to say goodbye. Bill realized his Ministry training was inadequate for moments like this. Instead of mumbling meaningless platitudes, he realized he could do more good praying quietly for God's grace on those involved, and to be there physically for emotional support.

When they had dried their eyes, Bill reminded them they needed to get back to Allakaket for the memorial service at noon, and it was almost 10:00. Anne had already packed Ron's suitcase, and they quickly put Lucky on a leash and led him to the plane. Ron and Bill got in front, leaving Anne and Roy to share the back seat with Lucky, who decided that it would be fun to lay across their laps. Roy didn't fight it, since he got the front half, and spent the rest of the flight petting Lucky. An hour and a half later, they landed in Allakaket. They checked into the inn and got dressed for the service. Lucky had to stay in their room, so Ron made sure he watered every tree in the neighborhood, and left him with food, water, and his bearskin rug. As they walked into the chapel, Jim's casket was there to greet them. Anne was glad that Jim had requested a closed casket service in advance. Looking at dead people gave her the willies. The rest of the service was a blur to Ron, and they endured the receiving line of well-wishers at the wake that the innkeeper had set up in the dining hall of the inn. Ron wasn't very hungry, so he ate a couple of deviled eggs, and asked his dad if he could go check on Lucky. Seeing how uncomfortable his son was, Roy said OK, and wished he could join him. Ron walked into his room and played with Lucky for a while, then fell asleep. In his dreams, he dreamed he was flying with Jim, and got the sense that Jim was at peace, and he wasn't to worry about him. In a way this was a better way to say goodbye to him than the funeral was. A couple of hours later, Roy knocked on his door and asked Ron if he wanted to come out for dinner. Ron was suddenly hungry, and got up and left Lucky in the room. Roy noticed the change in his son's behavior, and hoped the worst was over. He remembered when his grandfather died, and it had been pretty traumatic for him, since it was his first relative to die.

The next day, Bill called them into his office. "I've some legal matters to discuss with you, and some letters to give to each of you. First of all, here's the letters Jim left in his safe deposit box." He gave Ron 5 letters, and Anne and Roy got 1 each. "OK, that brings us to Jim's will. I'm not going to read it, since it's a bunch of legalese, so I'll give you the Reader's Digest version. Jim had a \$100,00.00 life insurance policy that matured 5 years ago. After funeral and burial expenses, that leaves 60 thousand dollars, which he said should be divided equally among the 3 of you since you were his only survivors. Ron, Jim was the sole owner of their flying business after Ron Fellows died in the plane crash. The business includes the DeHaviland, a 30,000 square foot commercial building and hangar that they owned outright. These are all adjacent to the Anchorage Commercial Airport on commercially valuable land. He's had a standing offer from the city of Anchorage to buy the buildings and the land for \$1Million dollars tax-free. Jim wanted you to have the business, and to do what you saw fit with it. Beyond that are some personal effects, including his pilot's watch, and his Randall Vietnam era Bowie, which is a collector's item, but I'm not sure of the value. Roy, Jim wanted you to have the watch, since it's exactly like Ron's watch, and he wanted Anne to have the knife. His house in Allakaket was rented, so the only valuables he had in his house was his personal effects. He had some firearms which he left to Roy to distribute as he saw fit." Ron couldn't believe it, he was a 14-yr old Millionaire, but he'd rather have his Gramps back. Roy asked Bill to drive them over to Jim's house so they could check out his personal belongings. He thought most of the stuff

could be donated to the village, and anyone who needed it could have it. He wanted to get a good look at those guns, because if he knew Jim, he would own some nice ones since he was a hunter and guide for years.

Bill drove them to Jim's house, and showed them where the guns were kept, and a pile of his personal belongings. Roy picked up the watch and slipped it on his wrist almost reverently. He handed Anne Jim's Randall Bowie, and looked through the rest of his stuff. There were his dog tags and other memorabilia from his service in Vietnam. Anne didn't know how Jim knew Ron, now she realized that they probably met in Vietnam. He told Anne he flew C-130's in Vietnam, and that's about all he told her. The pile of medals said something entirely different. Roy scooped up the medals, and placed them back in a shoebox with his dogtags. Just as he suspected, Jim had an excellent gun collection, including a 7mm Magnum rifle with a Leupold scope, several shotguns, and another Colt Anaconda. Roy and Ron picked them up along with the ammo and the accessories, and carried them back to the car. Bill said the rest of the stuff was clothes and furniture. Roy told Bill that they could donate the clothing and furniture to anyone in town who needed it, but to save anything that was either valuable or had sentimental value, and Ron would pick it up the next time he stopped in Allakaket. Bill almost smacked himself "That reminds me, Ron - the owner of that Cessna wanted you to keep it. He's never going to fly it again, and is pretty sure that he's going to be grounded in a year or two anyway. I can put it in Jim's old hangar for you, and have the mechanic mothball it for you." Ron was too numb to really respond, but said "OK Bill, that's fine with me, make sure you thank the owner for me." When they completed everything they needed to, Bill drove them back to the Inn, gathered their belongings and Lucky, and drove out to the plane.

Ron did a walk around, started the plane, taxied toward the pumps, and filled the tanks. He pulled a safe distance from the tanks and shut down again to help his Mom and Dad board, then handed them Lucky, and got back in the pilot's seat. After starting the motor again, and finishing his pre-flight, Ron gave his "Welcome to Allakaket Airlines" speech out of habit. When he turned around Roy and Anne were laughing hysterically. Lucky was looking at them like "did I miss something?" Ron taxied out to the downwind end of the lake, and turned for home. After he made sure the plane was set to fly, he pushed the throttle to full, and was airborne after a short but bumpy take-off run. They were back home in a little less than 2 hours, and Ron taxied up to the hangar, and inside, where he shut down, and switched everything off. They got out and unloaded the plane, then Anne asked if anyone wanted dinner. Roy suggested soup, and they all thought it was a good idea, so Anne made her famous vegetable and caribou meat soup.

The next morning, Ron talked to his dad after breakfast. "Dad, I need to be alone for a couple of days to think things through and read Jim's letters. Is it OK if Lucky and I go ski about 5 miles into the woods to that clearing about half way to the caribou hunting grounds. I'll only be gone a day or two, but I'll bring enough supplies for 5 days in the woods just in case. I'll call you every morning on the radio to let you know I'm ok."

Roy understood his son was still going through the grieving process, and knew he would be OK for a day or two in the woods with Lucky, so he gave Ron his blessing. Ron went to pack as Roy broke the news to Anne, who understood, but wasn't happy about it. Since Roy had already said OK, that was that, and Ron was going. She helped Ron pack and made sure he had plenty of food, including a large bag of dry dog food, since it was lighter than the cans. Ron took 5 days worth of food, and several changes of clothes, and added his sleeping pad to the pack. He brought a brick of 500 rounds of .22 ammo and a bag of golf balls for something to do. Roy had him pack a folding saw for cutting wood, and Anne gave him a large quantity of hot cocoa mix. He was wearing his Caribou skin clothes, and his parka, skiing gloves, and cross-country skiing boots. He packed his caribou boots for wearing around camp, and strapped his snowshoes to the outside of the pack. He was carrying his shoulder holster and fanny pack that had both his huge Bowie and his <skip> aboard, and a quart military canteen with cup and stove opposite on the fanny pack belt. He kissed his Mom, grabbed the letters, his GPS and his radio, then gave his dad a hug, and whistled for Lucky as he grabbed his skis. He knelt with Lucky once they were outside the door, and put his booties on, then straightened up, and Roy helped him into his pack, and he stepped into his ski bindings as Roy handed him his poles. Anne said "Take Care Ron." and he assured her he was going to be OK, and he'd call them every morning on the radio, but it would be off to conserve batteries otherwise.

They headed east, since Ron wasn't in any hurry they took their time. Ron admired the scenery, and Lucky either sniffed or watered every tree he came to. 3 hours later, he arrived at his campsite, and it didn't take him as long to set up his tent, since only a couple of inches of snow had fallen since the last time he had camped there. They were going to be there for a while, so Ron decided to build a fire and save his fuel for later. He took out his folding saw, and between that and the <skip>, Ron had a huge pile of wood, and a stack of kindling. He cleared a big area of snow downwind of the tent, and made sure there were no overhanging branches full of snow to douse his fire, then he set about making his fire. He had the time, so he broke out his flint and steel kit including a piece of flint, a hand striker of steel, and some char cloth that fit inside a large tobacco can. Hunting around his campsite, he found an old pine log that had rotted, and pulled a handful of powdery wood pulp out of the center. It was bone dry, and he knew that it would make excellent tinder since he could smell the pitch in it. Putting a piece of Char cloth in the center, he held the flint and the tinder in his left hand, and the steel in his right. He struck the flint with the steel, sending a huge shower of sparks into the char cloth. Ron held it to his face, and gently blew until he had a nice flame, then set it under a teepee of kindling. As the fire caught, he added bigger and bigger pieces, and soon he was adding branches that were an inch in diameter. He put his flint and steel kit back up, and sat down on a log to read Jim's letters.

## Chapter 85 - Letters from Nam

Ron opened Jim's first letter - it was labeled "Please Read First".

"Dear Ron:

If you're reading this, I'm dead. Hopefully you're at an age where you can understand that we don't belong here, and Death is just God's way of calling us home when we've finished our race. I left you the business so you could have financial independence. The city has been offering to buy the building and the land for over 10 years, since they wanted to build an industrial park on the site, and the FAA won't let them as long as there are hangars on the property. They can't use eminent domain for the same reasons, so they will have to give you more than fair market value for the buildings and property. Their last offer was 1 million dollars tax-free. By now they should be up to 1.2 or 1.5 million. You'll never earn a 10<sup>th</sup> of that renting the building as is, but it's up to you. I want you to know I am so proud of you, and wish I could have been there to see you grow up and become a man.

Bye for Now,

Jim

The next letter was in a sealed Envelope with Jim's name on it.

When he opened it, it read:

29Jan1968 Vietnam

To Whom It May Concern:

My Sergeant made me write this letter, even though I have no one to write too. I broke up with my Girlfriend shortly after getting assigned to Vietnam; she was yelling things like "Baby Killer" as she walked out of my life. My parents both died when I was young, and I was raised by my older brother and his wife. I always loved flying, and realized the Air Force was the best way to learn to fly and get an education. I knew I might get sent to Vietnam, but I figured since I was flying C-130 cargo planes that I would be safely behind the lines. Boy was I wrong. I'm flying support missions daily to front line firebases, and our favorite delivery methods are either a parachute drop or a LAPES extraction. Spending time on a runway under fire is a good way for your relatives to collect your GI insurance. I've already earned 2 Purple Hearts. My Sergeant calls them NVA target medals.

We're headed Northeast to the Cambodian border to support a SF firebase situated directly across the Ho Chi Min Trail. Sarge says that even though the US Army is standing down for

Tet, he's heard stuff from other sergeants and noncoms that the NVA and Charlie are planning a big offensive for Tet to break our will to fight and drive us out - fat chance. My Crew Chief was just talking to me, and told me they issued extra frag vests so we can sit on one, and wear the other. That's never happened before, and has a lot of us feeling uneasy. We're supposed to start flying at 1800 local, and keep it up until they say stop. The guys on the ground loading the birds are really going to be humping to keep up tonight. My Copilot is a real Hardcase, so they stuck him with the handle Case. They just call me Big Jim. Case says that we're going to see beaucoup VC tonight. My first load is several pallets of 105mm ammo. I hate flying ammo. 1 lucky hit and you're strumming a harp. Oh well, we all gotta die sometime. Later I'll meet with my crew chief and tell him I plan on a fast LAPES drop for the ammo, and he better be ready, since I'm not making a second pass. As 1800 gets closer, I can feel the tension in the pilot ready room rise, like the home team's locker room before the big game.

It's just about 1800, got to end this so I can give it to the Sarge.

By for now,

Jim

The next letter read:

06Feb1968 Vietnam

To Whom It May Concern:

Just a follow-up to let you know I survived. It was hairy down there. There were VC and NVA all over the place, and we were flying non-stop for 24 hours until they got a B-52 raid to break the attack. We were chased out of the area before the 52's came in, but we still saw and felt the blast of hundreds of iron bombs being dropped. One of my friends, Slim bought it on a LAPES run early in the evening when a ZSU caught him right after he dropped. The plane exploded into a fireball, but the Snakes orbiting the area saw the muzzle flashes and destroyed the Zoo with a volley of rockets. Right then I wished I were flying Spooky instead of a glorified garbage hauler, because I wanted revenge in the worst way. I would have expended every round on board, then thrown the brass at the VC and NVA.

On my last pass, I was hit again, and received what my CO called a "million dollar wound" which was severe enough to get me out of Vietnam without causing any permanent injury. I got called in for a Medevac since all the slicks were busy elsewhere, and I was the most experienced pilot available. I came to a stop on the runway with my engines turning, yelling at my Crew chief to get the wounded on board ASAP, because we were taking fire. Right then a group of 3 VC mortars picked that moment to land on the airstrip, close enough to wound me and Case. I told the CC that we were getting the Hell out right now, but he said



there were another 6 critically injured soldiers out there. The 2 minutes it took to load the wounded and get the Hell out of there were the longest 2 minutes in my life. Thank God the VC were either short on mortars, or didn't have their crews trained up, because a second volley would have blown us sky-high and taken the wounded with us. Finally, I heard the sound of the ramp closing, and I firewalled the engines and got the hell out of there.

2 days later, I woke up in the hospital with everything intact, with another Purple Heart and a Bronze Star pinned to my pillow. My CO told me they were processing the paperwork to send me home. I didn't argue, I had enough of Vietnam.

Jim

Ron read Jim's 4th letter as it was growing dark:

28Feb1968 Japan

I've been sent to the rehab hospital in Japan while my discharge papers are completed. I really don't need rehab for a wound to the butt, but I'm not arguing. The nurses are prettier, and I like it when they give me my sponge bath instead of the orderly who gave me my last one in Vietnam. I'm now sure everything is working thanks to that sweet nurse. She wished me well, and told me my paperwork would be processed in a week. Nothing like clean sheets and air conditioning. Now all I need is a cold beer.

My paperwork showed up today, so they have me scheduled for the next Freedom Bird as an Ambulatory patient, which means I can now drink beer. Great, they tell me I can have a beer right when I'm about to leave for the states.

Gotta Go, my ride home awaits,

Jim

Ron ate some jerky and drank some cocoa before going to bed. This time he was comfortable with his Thermarest sleeping pad underneath him. Lucky snuggled next to him, and soon they were fast asleep.

The next morning after breakfast, Ron read Jim's last letter.

01Oct2003 Alaska

When I got home in 1970, I went to College for a while, then finally chucked it all and moved to Alaska. All the women I dated in College were either radical feminists or drugged-out hippies. I'd seen enough drug abuse in Vietnam to know I wanted none of that. I got a letter from Ron Fellows asking if I were interested in going into business with him in

Anchorage Alaska guiding and flying hunters in Alaska. He knew someone with a restored DeHaviland for sale cheap, and I still had almost 100 grand left in my trust fund that my Brother set up when my parents died. He and his wife died in a car crash shortly after I was sent to Vietnam, but I didn't tell anyone so I could stay. His will stipulated that anything left from their estate should be deposited in my trust fund if they didn't have any kids. They never had any, so I got almost \$100 thousand, but I was totally alone in the world. Hooking up with Ron was a gift from God, since I had no where to go, and had become a total loner. I dropped out of College and moved to Alaska.

It was really weird, I met Ron about a week before my last mission, and never heard from him again until I got the letter from Alaska. I have no idea how he found me, but I was glad he did. Ron greeted me like a long lost brother, and my healing began. A couple of years later, Ron fixed me up with a barmaid from Anchorage. I lived with her for 6 months until I went to the doctor because we were doing everything right, but she didn't get pregnant. When she found out I was sterile due to the injury, she left and never came back. Losing her hurt so bad that I never dated again.

A couple of years later, Ron's parents died within a couple of weeks of each other, so he moved up north of Allakaket to raise his brother and kid sister. He still flew when I needed a guide, and I took over the freight and passenger flying full time. I remember the day he died like yesterday. For some reason he left his Colt Anaconda in his desk, and he never went anywhere without it. I got worried when he didn't come back when he was scheduled to, so I flew out to where they were supposed to be, but there was no sign of them, or any indication that they had even landed there recently. I flew a circle search, then called the FAA and reported a missing and presumed downed pilot. That got every pilot up and flying until the FAA called the search after a week. Your Dad would have been found if he were anywhere near where he was supposed to be. When they declared your Dad and Ron "Missing and Presumed Dead" the hardest thing I ever had to do was to tell Anne her brother was missing and probably dead. A year later, when Roy showed up in Allakaket with his amazing story, I didn't know what to say. I wanted to know why Ron died and your Dad lived. On the trip back to the cabin, we had a long talk, and when we stopped at Ron's grave, I knew that Roy tried to save Ron, but he was already dead, and your Dad was lucky to make it out of the plane alive. I flew him into Allakaket a few years later when the tree fell on him, and thought it was funny when Steve set them up so obviously. I hoped they wouldn't get hurt like I did, and I felt protective towards Anne, since I had always been "Uncle Jim" to her as she was growing up. When they announced their engagement, and set a wedding date, I was extremely happy for them, and honored when Roy asked me to be his best man. Later, when you were born, your parents asked me to be your surrogate Grandpa, and that was another red letter day. Every chance I could, I flew up to see you. Watching you grow up was almost like I was watching my own son grow up.

When you decided to take flying lessons, I knew one day you'd take over from me, I just didn't realize it would be so soon. Listening to you and Steve talk about what you were

doing at MacDill, I was so proud I could bust. I knew you were a good shooter, but I never realized how good. I could tell you were having the time of your life. When your Dad got sick, I was worried that you might fold, but you were made of stronger stuff. I wish I were young enough to do half the stuff you did that week.

When we went home and I saw the doctor, I thought our dream was over since I couldn't fly. I never imagined you would turn out to be such a mature pilot at such a young age. You took to flying like a duck to water, and you gained experience and learned much faster than anyone I had known.

Bye for now,

Gramps

Ron folded the letters, and put them in his backpack, then had a good cry. Lucky walked up to him, sat down and Ron wrapped his arms around Lucky's neck, and got it all out.

A couple of hours later, Ron got his radio out, and called home.

"Dad, I'm coming home - see you in a couple of hours."

"See you soon son."

Ron took his time re-packing his gear and breaking camp. Finally he shouldered his backpack, stepped into his skis, made sure the fire was out cold, and stepped over to his tracks. He whistled for Lucky, then set out for home. Several hours later, he arrived at the cabin, and Roy was waiting for him.

"How are you feeling Son?"

"Much better now - Dad, I've got a question. Jim suggested that I sell the business in Anchorage to the city - it's worth over a Million dollars, but I need someplace to keep the DeHaviland."

"Ron, kick off your skis and sit down for a while, I need to tell you something."

"While you were gone, Anne and I had a talk, and realized that I probably wouldn't outlive her. She told me that she couldn't live here without me, so she would probably move back to Allakaket, and work part time for the town doctor. She won't need the money, but it would give her something to do. She agreed that when I died, that I would will the homestead to you instead of her, since you'd use it before her, and if she had a medical condition that required her to go to a nursing home, the state might try and attach the homestead to pay for it. This way you are guaranteed to have the homestead to come home

to when you retire from the Air Force. Until then, you can always park the plane in the hangar, even after you leave for the Air Force.”

“Thanks Dad, that settles it, I’m going to sell the building and the land to the City of Anchorage, and I’ll keep the DeHaviland here.”

Ron stood up and gave his Dad a big hug. Then he walked in the door and gave his Mom a hug and a kiss on the cheek. Later he called Bill on the radio and asked him to handle the negotiations to sell the property to the City, and keep 10% for himself.

Bill called back later that evening and said the City offered 1.5 million tax-free for the building and the land. Bill made sure that the plane wasn’t part of the deal, and told Ron. Ron told him to take the offer, take care of the paperwork, and deposit \$1.35 Million in his bank account. Ron would have traded every penny to get his Gramps back.

## Chapter 86 - Poor Little Rich Kid

Ron kept himself busy, and later in the week, Bill called and said he needed to fly to Allakaket to sign the paperwork. Since he was a minor, his mom or dad, or both, needed to sign as well. When they hung up, Ron asked his parents if they wanted to fly to Allakaket. He explained that one of them needed to sign the sales contract since he was a minor. Anne asked if they could fly out first thing tomorrow, and then fly to Anchorage to do some shopping. Roy thought that would be a good idea, so Ron called Bill back. They would probably stay overnight in Anchorage, and Ron asked Bill if he could watch Lucky if they left him overnight. Since Lucky liked Bill, or anyone who would play with him, he didn't see a problem. They packed an overnight bag, and Bill called the Inn that Ron had the contract with, and booked 2 adjoining rooms for the next night. When the Reservationist heard Ron's name, she said they had a 2-bedroom suite that was vacant and they could give it to him at the same cost. Bill took the deal, since the rooms were bigger and nicer.

The next morning, they were in the air at first light flying to Allakaket. Bill showed them the contract, and they double-checked everything, including the stipulation that this was just a sale of the land and building, and that the plane remained Ron's. Anne read the contract, since her vision was better. Roy told her to go ahead and sign, then Ron signed below his mom, and Bill witnessed and notarized the signatures. He said that the City would wire transfer 1.5 million to Bill, who would deduct his 10% fee, and deposit the balance into Ron's account by close of business today. They weren't too worried, since Ron had almost \$100,000.00 in his account between what he earned over the summer, and his share of Jim's estate. Roy and Anne weren't paupers either, and both had over \$60,000.00 each in their accounts. Everyone had checks and American Express Credit Cards for shopping. With the paperwork finished, they got back in the plane, and were in Anchorage 2 hours later. Anne wanted to hit a fabric store, and Ron and Roy wanted to check out a sporting goods store, so Anne said she'd meet them at the hotel in 3 hours.

They took two separate cabs, and Roy asked the cabbie to take them to a really good sporting goods store. As they were walking around, Ron spotted a pair of Burris Laser Rangefinding binoculars and almost choked on the price. The salesman was there to help, and Ron asked if they had a demo with the batteries in to check it. He reached behind the counter, showed Ron how to use them, and Ron was amazed. He looked at an object, and when he touched a button, the range flashed in red in the bottom of the image. It was a 7x40 binocular and the image was tack sharp. He asked the salesman if he could negotiate on the price, he had an AMEX card with over \$100K available. The salesman almost started laughing until he realized that this was that kid he had read about in the papers, knowing how much the average bush pilot charged per trip to the hunting lodges, he had no reason to doubt him. He said he could take 20% off the marked price, which wasn't too bad, since it was marked at \$684.00. "So you'll sell a brand new in box unit to me for \$547.20?"

“You did that in your head?”

“Sure - discounts are a walk in the park compared to Calculus.” Do you have any Shearling jackets?”

“Right over here - what sizes were you looking for?”

“Probably a Men’s large for my Dad, and a Women’s Medium for my mom.”

The salesman kept the boxed scope with him, and walked Ron over to the Fashion Jackets. They had a beautiful bunch of Shearling full-length jackets on the racks. Ron spotted his Dad and called him over, and the salesman handed him a Men’s large. It was a perfect fit. Ron turned to his Dad, and asked him what size Mom wore. Roy told him to get a Woman’s Large since these jackets seemed to run small. While the salesman was busy looking, Ron spotted a Man’s small and tried it on - it was a perfect fit. Looking at the tag in the sleeve, his jacket was \$600, and he spotted the tag in his Dad’s jacket at \$800.00. His mom’s jacket was \$850. When the salesman handed him the other jacket, Ron asked him “Can you give me the same discount on these jackets?”

The salesman realized Ron was buying almost \$3,000.00 worth of merchandise, he agreed to the 20% discount on the whole order in a heartbeat. Ron, said “Cool, I got almost \$3,000 worth of stuff for \$2347.20 plus tax.”

“How do you do that?”

“I have no idea, I just see the numbers in my head.”

“Ok, the sales tax is 7% - what’s the total?”

“\$2488.03 - Right?”

The salesman whipped out his calculator, and was flabbergasted when the numbers matched to the penny.

“Kid, you’re amazing. Let’s go ring this up.”

They walked over to the register, where Ron surrendered his American Express Card.

“Don’t leave home without it - right Ron?”

“Yes sir, I’ve charged several nights lodging at the Anchorage Inn on this card.”

“I know you, you’re that 14-yr old kid that flies hunters around. I read an article about you

in the paper. You're even more amazing in real life."

"Thanks, but it's just God's Gift."

Ron signed the receipt for the purchases.

"Would you like these gift wrapped?"

"Sure, everything but the binoculars. Did you include batteries in it?"

"It's got a set of Lithium batteries built in, so they'll work well in Alaska."

"How long do they last - I live way out in the sticks."

"You might want to buy 2 spares - tell you what, I'll throw them in, I'll be right back."

The salesman walked over to the battery display and took down 2 of the freshest Lithium batteries he had in stock for the binoculars, then came back put them in the bag with the binoculars and gift wrapped the jackets, and handed the whole package to Ron, then helped him out the door. A cab pulled right up to them, and they got in, then said "Anchorage Inn, please."

10 minutes later, they arrived at the Inn, Roy had all the cash, so he paid the driver, and Ron waited for him. They got to their room, and Anne wasn't back yet. Ron looked at his Pilot's Chronometer, and she had only been gone 2 and a half hours. Half an hour later, Anne showed up with an armload of bags full of fabric and sewing notions. When she set the bags down, Ron handed her the box. "For Me?"

"No, I thought Lucky might like it - go ahead and open it Mom."

Anne opened the box, and saw the beautiful Shearling coat, set the box down and gave Ron a big hug and kiss on the cheek. "Thanks Son, you shouldn't have."

"Just consider it an early Mother's Day present. I gave Dad one too - let's see it on."

Anne took the jacket all the way out of the box, slipped it on, and it fitted perfectly. Roy and Ron modeled theirs as well. Anne let out a Wolf Whistle, and Ron blushed, but Roy grinned. Ron may have bought his mom a nice present, but Roy was going to get the reward. They boxed up their jackets again, and locked the door as they went out to dinner at the restaurant next door. Roy turned to Ron and whispered "Let me buy Dinner, OK." Ron knew what his Dad was up to, so just grinned. He'd need the earplugs again tonight.

The next morning, both Anne and Roy were grinning like idiots as they went to breakfast.

Ron was too nice to say anything, but thought “Man I hope I don’t look that silly when I get older.” After Breakfast, they checked out, and Ron put the room on his AMEX, then they caught a cab to the airport. Ron did a walk-around, then fired up the engine, and helped his parents aboard as it warmed up. When it had warmed up, Ron taxied to the runway, got permission to take off, and was airborne after a short run. His GPS was already set for Allakaket, and an hour and a half later, called the tower for permission to land. Bill called and said he would meet them at the fuel pumps to deliver Lucky. He landed perfectly, taxied to the fuel pumps, and while Roy and Anne stretched their legs, Ron filled the tanks and checked the fluids. Bill came driving up with Lucky, who tried to knock Ron down, but he was on a leash. Bill gave Ron the leash, hugged Anne, and shook Roy’s hand and said he had to get back to work. He turned and told Ron that he posted the 1.35 Million into his account last night. Ron said that was good, because a \$3,000 AMEX bill would be hitting his account in the next couple of days. Bill almost said something, then remembered that with almost 1.5 million dollars in the bank, Ron didn’t have to worry about money unless he went crazy spending it. Ron didn’t seem the type. Bill helped Anne and Roy back into the plane, and handed them Lucky, then closed the door. Ron waved, waited until Bill was clear, then started the engine, and turned and taxied out to the lake. Two minutes later they were airborne headed home. Ron landed about 2 hours later, and taxied right into the hangar. Roy and Anne piled out, then Lucky jumped, and they unloaded the plane. It was cold enough to wear their new jackets indoors, so that’s exactly what they did. Roy thought they could save on wood, and take advantage of Ron’s gift in more ways than one. Later that evening when it got really cold, Roy lit a fire in the fireplace.



## Chapter 87 - Biathlon

Ron spent the next couple of months skiing his 3 mile cross-country course, and his times slowly improved, as did his stamina. Eventually he was able to hit the broad side of a barn after skiing his course, and slowly improved, until right before the snow melted, he was able to ski a loop, shoot 10 shots standing, and hit all the targets. He never was able to find out what his competitors times were, and at this point, he probably would have been discouraged. Ron spent time with his mom and dad, when he wasn't training, ski touring and snow camping. Anne wasn't a big fan of snow camping, but figured anything that got Roy out and exercising was worth it. Roy made sure to pack their air mattresses, so Anne would be comfortable. They even got in a few rounds of .22 golf. Ron asked Roy, "If this is .22 Golf, where's the sand traps?" Roy said there were no sand traps, just huge snow drifts.

Lucky liked the snow camping and touring much more than Ron's training runs, since Ron was now going fast enough that Lucky couldn't keep up, so he waited on the porch. Ron made a couple of deliveries during the winter, but other than that, it was a pretty slow winter flying.

Ron got an emergency call on the radio one day "Ron, This is Bill, I need you to fly to Slim's place ASAP, he thinks he's broken his leg."

Ron acknowledged the call, yelled for his Mom, who handed him the Trauma kit, and said she was going with him, so they could bring the full kit. Roy would have to keep Lucky company, and maybe eat Spaghetti-O's for dinner. She put on her parka, and handed Ron his, then they hurried to the plane. Ron did an abbreviated walk-around, jumped in the plane, and started the motor while Anne secured the medical kit, and removed the back seats. As soon as the engine was warmed up, he taxied out to the lake, and took off for Slim's place. An hour later, they arrived, and as soon as the propeller stopped spinning, Anne was out the door with her trauma bag. She yelled to the house "Slim, you in there?"

"Yeah whoever you are, I'm laying on the floor and I think I broke my leg." Anne opened the door, and Slim had definitely broken his lower leg. He was weak and shocky but other than that, and a broken leg, he was OK. Anne put a Sam splint on him, and Ron grabbed his hand-held radio so Anne could talk to the doctor in Allakaket. "Dr. Miller, this is Anne Williams, I'm at Slim's cabin. He's got a broken tibia, and he's going into shock. I've splinted the leg with a Sam splint, but, he's old and shocky, so I wanted to start an IV."

"Ok Anne, 1 liter D5W on slow drip, monitor vitals, and transport ASAP."

"Anything for pain?"

"If he's in a lot of pain, give him MS 5mg IV."

“Roger, MS 5mg IV if in serious pain, anything else?”

“Call me when you’re half an hour out, so we can meet you with an ambulance.”

“Roger, We’ll call you when we’re ½ an hour out.”

“Ron, get over here and help me carry Slim to the plane.”

Ron grabbed the stretcher, and they gently log-rolled Slim onto it. Anne put the IV bag under his shoulder so it would keep flowing right, and they picked him up as gently as they could, and carried him to the back door of the plane. They slid him against the far wall, and secured him as best as possible. Anne climbed in after him with her stethoscope and BP cuff already out. Ron closed and locked the door, then ran around and jumped in the pilot’s seat. He started right up, and as soon as the motor was warmed up, he said “Hold on, the plane’s going to move.” Anne sat down Indian Style until he was flying straight and level, and held on to a strap. Once Ron had stabilized at 2,000 feet, Anne went back to work. Slim was stable, and the morphine had taken effect, so he was much more comfortable. Anne took her grease pencil, and wrote M5 1400 on his forehead, meaning she had given him 5mg of Morphine at 1400, so they wouldn’t accidentally give him an overdose. An hour and a half later, Ron called on the aircraft’s radio “Allakaket Control, requesting permission to land, and let Doc Miller know we’re ½ an hour out.”

“Roger, will advise, good luck.”

Ron set the plane up for landing, but kept his speed up to the last second. He floated the plane in to a gentle landing, and taxied right up to the waiting ambulance. Bill and Doc Miller hustled Slim out of the plane, and carried him into the ambulance, which sped off. Ron refilled the plane, and 15 minutes later Bill came back. “Slim’s fine, it was a simple break. Doc Miller was impressed by you two. He wanted to see you both to tell you personally - let’s go.”

They got in Bill’s car, and drove to the doctor’s clinic. Slim was resting comfortably with a cast on his leg. Doc Miller shook both their hands, then took them outside.

“Anne, I don’t want to know where you got the IV and the MS, but I think old Slim would have died without them. I wanted to personally thank you two, and tell you that I’m going to send a letter to the State Medical Boards recommending you both be certified as Paramedics, since you’re obviously capable. Also, I wanted to offer to replace any meds and supplies you use at State expense, and I can order all your controlled meds as your stock needs to be replaced.”

“Doc Miller, Thanks, that’s really nice of you. Steve ordered some stuff for us before he left, and most of it’s still OK, but if you could get another Trauma Kit for Ron to stash in his plane, he could take care of any emergencies that might crop up while he’s flying instead of having to fly all the way home to pick me up. I know in a couple of months, he’ll have enough book

knowledge to pass the EMT II or Paramedic test, but he can't get the practical knowledge out here. And I don't think the hospital wants a 14 year old kid hanging around their ER."

"Anne, you're right about that, but still having the book knowledge and the gear beats not having it. I'll requisition another Paramedic kit from the State."

Doc Miller shook both their hands, they checked in on Slim, and Bill drove them back to the plane. They got home right before dark, and Roy hadn't eaten yet, so Anne made dinner.

Ron spent the rest of the winter studying, surfing the internet, and playing with Lucky, since the snow was too slushy to ski. Finally the lake melted out, so Ron and his dad spent the day putting the pontoons back on. The next day Ron got a call from Bill that they had some deliveries to pick up and a couple of packages for Ron and Anne. Since he was already up, dressed, and had eaten breakfast, he grabbed his gear and headed out to the plane. Taxiing with the pontoons took some getting used to again, but he did OK. Once he was fully waterborne, he taxied to the end of the lake, entered the waypoint for Anchorage into his GPS, and took off. 2 hours later, he landed at Anchorage, and loaded up. The two boxes addressed to him and his mom were large and heavy. He filled the tanks, then requested clearance, and took off. After he finished his deliveries, he stopped in Allakaket to refuel. Bill said he would be waiting for him, someone wanted to see him. After he refueled the plane, Bill drove up and drove him to the Clinic. Slim was sitting there wearing a cast up to his knee and walking on crutches. When Ron walked into the clinic, Slim stood up and shook his hand saying "Young Man, I owe you my life. Thanks just doesn't cover it."

"Slim, my mom actually saved your life, all I did was fly."

"That's not the way I heard it son. Seem to me that even if your mom weren't there you'd have been able to handle it. I was talking to the Doc, and he said the State was making you guys certified Paramedics. If we'd have had you a couple of years back, my partner Eddie would be alive today. I'd appreciate if you could give me a lift back to my cabin."

"Sure Slim, it's right on the way."

Bill helped Slim into the Jeep, and Ron rode in back. When they got to the plane, Ron got out and helped Slim in. After he locked the door, he walked around the plane, checking everything, then jumped in the pilot's seat, and pre-flighted it. Once the engine was warmed up, he entered the waypoint for Slim's cabin and called the tower. He taxied to the end of the lake, and set the plane up to take off. He skipped the "Welcome" speech, and turned to take off. An hour later, they were at Slim's cabin, and Ron helped him inside, and helped him get settled. A couple of hours later, he said goodbye, got back in the plane, and headed home. Anne was surprised when she saw how big the packages were. They were full of gear, supplies, duffle bags, and grab bags. There was even a hard case that would mount to the bulkhead of the aircraft so Ron would have a complete kit wherever the plane was. One piece of gear that he couldn't figure

out was the 2 Nite Ize Pock-Its until he read the letter explaining that they were for holding their basic EMT tools including the shears, penlight, CPR Mask, 2 pair of gloves, wipes and a Gerber Multitool. They took the rest of the afternoon putting their kits together, and mounting Ron's kit to the bulkhead of the plane next to the back door. He slid his Go bag under the passenger seat, since his spares kit was under his seat.

They didn't have anything urgent for the next couple of days, and Anne wanted to make a shopping run to Anchorage, so they got up early the next morning, and piled into the plane. Lucky by now was an old hand and jumped right in the back. They made reservations at the Inn, so they could spend the entire day shopping and seeing the sights. 2 hours later, they were in Anchorage. Anne took off to the grocery and craft stores, so Roy and Ron headed back to the Sporting Goods store. The salesman greeted them like long-lost cousins, since the last time they were there, Ron dropped almost \$3 grand. His commission on that one sale almost equaled his salary for that month. Ron asked him if they sold any mountain bikes. Dave showed him the entire line, when Ron noticed the Specialized Rockhopper A1 FSR XC was on close-out for \$750.00. Ron asked if he could get it cheaper in the box, since they needed to ship it in their airplane home. Dave said that price included assembly, and they could reduce that price by \$50.00 if they'd take a bike in a box. Ron asked what accessories came with. He said that it came with 2 caged water bottles, and he'd throw in a wheel-riding speedometer/odometer. Ron asked if he had any Cat's Eye light kits, the 12-volt model. Dave said he'd look. 5 minutes later, he had an old dusty box in his hands containing a 12v Cat's eye light kit. It was marked \$100.00 but he'd sell it to Ron for \$50.00. The cat's eye system included a 12vdc 2Ah gel cell and a Xenon/twin white LED headlamp that rode on top of the battery, and an LED rear red light that was integral to the generator. Ron looked around and found a Princeton headlamp with a xenon/LED lamp that took 4 AA batteries. They wanted \$40.00 for the headlight, and Ron realized the extra weight and drag of the generator set wouldn't be worth the few times he'd need it, so he asked Dave to put the Cat's Eye back. He spotted a tool kit that would fit under the seat that included a patch kit, tire irons, and a dog bone wrench. There was a good air pump next to it, so he got that too. They had a set of open-end wrenches in a nearby aisle, so he added that to the pile.

He picked up the headlamp and 2 4-packs of NiMh batteries. Between headlamp and the batteries, the cost was the same. He smacked himself on the forehead when he remembered he already had a Princeton Headlamp just like it, but he still needed the batteries, since he only had alkalines. Ron told Dave to hold the bike for him, he had some more shopping to do. They wandered over to the firearms display, and Ron saw a very strange looking rifle. Since he was under age, he pointed it out to his dad, who asked the salesman if he could look at it. They looked at it together, and found that it was a Kel-Tec SU-16. The action broke in half right behind the chamber at the trigger guard, and only need a pin removed or replaced to either break it in half, or make it ready to shoot. Then the salesman showed Roy how the handguard folded down to form a bipod, and it also took inexpensive USGI M-16/AR-15 mags. Roy looked at the price, \$525.00 with 1 10-round magazine. Roy asked if the sales manager was handy, and 2 minutes later he was talking to Larry the store manager. "May I help you?"

“We’d like to buy this rifle, and the Rockhopper bike, and I wanted to know if you could give me a discount on the rifle.”

“Yes sir, Dave told me you’ve been spending some money here lately. I can give you a standard discount of 20% on all future orders. Here’s my card with the discount code on the back.”

Roy looked at his name tag, then said “Thank you Larry, I’m sure we’ll do more business with you in the future. Ok, I’ll take the rifle, 3 USGI 20-round mags, 1 cases of 5.56 NATO ball and 1 case of 55gr SPBT ammo for this gun, as well as a cleaning kit, and a hard Pelican case that will hold the gun collapsed, and the 3 loaded mags.”

“Sir, we have all that in stock, anything else?”

“Now that you mentioned it, I’d like a new smoke pole. What do you have in stock.”

“We’ve got Flintlocks, Percussion and 209 in-lines.”

“What’s a 209 In-line?”

“It uses a 209 Shotgun primer, with an in-line ignition system, for reliability and accuracy.”

“Cool, no more misfires or hang fires.”

“Not as often anyway. The action is essentially weatherproof once you load it, so it’s a perfect Black Powder hunting rifle system.”

“Can you shoot patched Balls or Sabots?”

“Most modern muzzleloaders easily shoot both, all you have to do is match the bullet weight to the rifling, and select the right caliber. Start with the recommended powder load, and experiment carefully to find the most accurate load for the round you’re shooting.”

“Great, can you show me some in-line 209’s?”

“Right this way.”

Larry showed Roy about 6-8 rifles in calibers ranging from .45 to .54. He liked the feel, balance and length of pull of the .50 Traditions Pursuit Pro. It’s stainless barrel and synthetic stock were a bonus for hunting in Alaska. Larry suggested .50 caliber sabots if he were hunting, and Minnie ball or round ball for target shooting. Roy asked what quantity the ammo came in, and he said they usually came 100 balls per box, or 500 sabots, and you get the bullets separately. He recommended the .45 JHP 200gr bullets for the sabots.

“I’ll take the rifle, 500 round balls, 500 sabots, and 500 of the 200gr JHP bullets.”

“Sir, you’ll need patches, primers, Pyrodex Pellets, starter, worm, synthetic ram rod, possibles bag, and a tool/cleaning kit.”

“Ok, set me up.”

Larry reached behind the counter, pulled 2000 rounds worth of 50gr. pellets and primers, and all the gear he would need. Larry suggested a Redfield 3x9x50 for extra light gathering. He could have it mounted and boresighted in an hour. Besides it would take that long to do the instant background check.

“Can you ring everything up here so I can pay on my credit card?”

“Sure - Can I have your card?”

Roy handed Larry his platinum AMEX card.

Larry rang up everything he had purchased so far, and then applied the 20% discount, and charged tax. He waived the background check fee. “Ok Mr. Williams - here’s your card and your receipt, everything will be ready for you in an hour. If there is anything else I can do, please ask me.”

“OK, where can we go to kill an hour?”

“Mr. Williams, we have a laser-tag room in the back if you want, or there’s a nice coffee shop next door. Feel free to use the laser-tag room.”

“Larry, I think I’m a little too old for that, but I think Ron might be game.”

“Ok, I’ve got a lunch break coming up - Ron, you want to play laser tag?”

“You got a sniper rifle setup?”

“We’ve got pistols and rifles - sniper is up to you.”

“Ok Larry you’re ON.”

Roy knew Larry might be in for a surprise, and decided to forgo the coffee shop.

An hour later, a much more humble and \$20.00 poorer manager was shaking his head, wondering how a 14-year old kid could shoot like that.

When they got back to the gun department, the scoped rifle was sitting on the counter waiting for Larry to sign the paperwork.

“Ron, I don’t know how you did it, I’ve been playing this game for 5 years and only lost once, and that was today.”

“How about a rematch next time I’m in Anchorage, I fly here almost every week.”

“You’re a pilot.?”

“Yes sir, been flying commercial for almost a year. That red and white DeHaviland Otter on space 54 is mine.”

“Didn’t that plane belong to Jim?”

Roy spoke up at this point.

“Jim died recently from complications of arteriosclerosis. He had to stop flying over a year ago, and Ron was learning how to fly. Jim was Ron’s “Grandpa” and when he couldn’t fly anymore, the FAA waived the age limit so we would have a commercial pilot in Allakaket.”

Larry grabbed a dolly to bring the heavy stuff out to the cab. Roy hoped the inn had a dolly so they could get the ammo to their room easily. They paid the cabbie, and a bellboy helped unload the cab with a luggage rack. Roy gave the bellboy a \$5.00 tip, and asked him to put it in their room. Anne wasn’t back yet.

Anne showed up with cases of food, 100 pounds of rice, 100 pounds of whole wheat flour, 10 frozen whole chickens packed in dry ice, several bunches of celery, a case of instant oatmeal, a 25-pound bag of raisins, Salt, Sugar, Cinnamon, Dry Teriyaki mix, and a bunch of other stuff. Ron was horrified because he knew that he’d have to load all this in the plane without getting paid for it. They went out to dinner, and went to bed early.

The next morning, they got up, raided the breakfast bar, and called a cab. The cabbie grumbled that they really needed a forklift for all this, and he called his brother to bring his pickup. Roy paid them another \$20 to load it, plus his brother’s gas. They pulled up to the plane, and before Ron could get out, they started loading the plane. Ron didn’t object. When they finished, Roy gave them \$10 each for a tip, and paid the cabbie what was on the meter. Ron double checked the plane, and they got in. Lucky jumped up on Roy and Anne’s lap for the trip home. Ron skipped the “Welcome” speech, and started the plane. Once everything was good to go, he called the tower, and was given immediate takeoff clearance. 2 hours later, He debated flying straight home, but his fuel gauge was below half due to the cargo, and he decided to refuel in Allakaket. After a brief fueling stop, and a pit stop for Lucky, they were on their way home. Ron grabbed the cart to unload the plane, Roy and Anne helped where they could. He was

really tired when he finished unloading the plane, so he waited until tomorrow to put his bike together. Anne got a look at what they had bought and was wondering what was in the Pelican case. Ron showed her his new Plane Gun. She thought it was cute.



## Chapter 88 - Disappointments

The next morning, Ron followed the directions to assemble his Mountain Bike. Just as he was getting ready to try it out, Anne spoke up. “Ron Williams, where’s your Helmet?”

“Mom, I forgot to get one.”

“No helmet, no Ride.”

“Mom, the nearest helmet is in Anchorage, and even if I order it, I still need to fly 4 hours round trip to get it - wouldn’t that be much more dangerous than not wearing a helmet until I get one?”

“Nice Try Mister. That bike stays put until you have a helmet on your head.” Roy overheard Anne and Ron arguing, but knew better than to get in the middle of this one, and made himself scarce. He thought Ron was right, but trying to argue logically with a Woman rarely worked, especially a Mother.

Ron put the bike up, and uncased the SU-16. “Where are you going young man?”

“Mom, I’ve been shooting since I’ve been 10 years old - what, now I have to wear a helmet to shoot?”

“Roy Williams, Get in here.”

Roy walked as slowly as he could. He knew what was coming.

“Ron you know better than to sass your Mother, now apologize.”

“Mom, I’m sorry. I won’t ride the bike without a helmet. Can I try out my new rifle?”

“Roy, you want to go with him?”

Seeing a way out of his predicament, Roy agreed in a heartbeat. Ron grabbed a set of ear and eye protection for his Dad, and grabbed a combat pack of the 5.56 NATO ammo, and the Pelican case containing his SU-16. He handed a set to his Dad, and put his on, then they beat a hasty retreat out the door. When they were well out of earshot, Ron asked his Dad what was wrong with his Mom.

“Ron, it’s in your medical books, Mom is going through menopause, and when the symptoms are really bad, she might act irrationally. Don’t antagonize her, but don’t patronize her either. That crack about helmets and shooting was just the thing to set her off.

I agree that you are doing stuff much more dangerous than riding a bike, but I don't let you run the chainsaw without protective equipment either. Helmets reduce risk, and are a good thing. You really don't need to ride the bike right now, and I'm sure Bill will have you make a trip to Anchorage in the next couple of days."

They hiked halfway to the lake, and Ron saw a tree trunk section that he had used previously for a target, so he turned it around and paced back 100 yards and drew a line, then back another 100 and drew another, then he carried the case forward to the 100-yard line. He laid down a tarp on the ground and opened the case. First he read the owner's manual, then he picked up the rifle, and re-assembled it. He opened the combat pack, and loaded the 10-round magazine, then made sure their ears were on, and went prone to check the zero of the rifle. He fired a 5-shot group, then put the safety on and pointed the rifle in a safe direction and walked over to check his rounds. They were 3 inches high, and 3 inches right. He came back to the rifle, and re-set the sights. Then he got back down prone, and fired another 5 shot group, and repeated the process. When he came back to his dad, he was visibly upset.

"Dad, this rifle's only shooting a little over 2 inches at 100 yards."

"Ron, I hate to tell you, but that's about average for a light carbine, which is what a SU-16 is. The military is happy as a pig in slop if their M-16's shoot a 2MOA group. Your Browning A-bolt with the BOSS is a precision rifle. Most rifle carbines like the AR-15, Mini-14, etc are very light with skinny barrels, and tend to shoot much bigger groups than a bolt-action precision rifle. A 2" group from something as light as your SU-16 is actually pretty good."

Ron backed up to the 200-yard line, and repeated the process. Either he was getting more familiar with the gun, or it was breaking in, because he shot a 3 inch group. He still wasn't happy about the accuracy, but realized that he couldn't carry his Browning A-bolt as a plane gun. He took it back home, cleaned it, reloaded all 4 mags and put it back in his case, then installed a second set of brackets high in the passenger cabin where he could reach it, and clamped the case into the brackets. He shook the case to make sure it was secure, and it was mounted solidly. Roy wanted to try out his new black powder rifle, so he and Ron walked back out to the spot where he was shooting. Roy had been reading the manual while Ron cleaned his rifle, and installed it in the plane. He carried a box of Pyrodex pellets, and sabots loaded with .45 bullets, and enough primers for the bullets he brought in his possibles bag. He had read up, and for what he wanted to do, 1 Pyrodex pellet was plenty. He ran a cleaning patch down the bore, then dry patches until they came up dry, then dropped a Pyrodex pellet down the muzzle, followed by a sabot bullet. He used his starter, then the ramrod to fully seat the bullet, then marked the ramrod like the instructions said. He broke open the action, and placed a primer over the nipple, closed the action, and shouldered the rifle. Since he was prone, the barrel was extremely stable, and he cocked the hammer and when the sights steadied on the center, he squeezed the trigger. He did that 3 more times, then they walked down to the log to check his target. Roy had shot a 1" group with his new

smokepole. Roy was really happy since the best group he had shot with his .54 Hawken flintlock was a 2" group at 100 yards. Roy decided to push his luck and try the 200 yard line. 3 shots later, he too had shot a 3" group.

Ron wanted to return his gun until Roy caught him, turned him around, and said "Ron, that SU-16 is performing exactly as designed. It's a difficult gun to shoot accurately, but it weighs ½ what your Browning A-bolt does, and it folds in half - How many guns do you know that can fold in half and still shoot sub-2 MOA groups? You want a tack driver, you already own 2 of them. You need to realize that sometimes practical accuracy is better than sub-moa accuracy. If you're a grunt on the ground, and your average contact distance is 50 yards, which would you rather carry, a 5 pound gun that can hit a man at 100 yards all day, or a 20 pound gun that can hit a man at 600 yards? Remember, you have to carry all your ammo and you need to carry enough to survive multiple firefights. That 600 yard rifle is useless in triple-canopy jungle where you can't even see more than 100 yards, and it's 4 times as heavy."

"Ok Dad, message received. Seems today is my day to stick my feet in my mouth. Sorry if I seemed ungrateful."

"I wouldn't say ungrateful, I just think you're spoiled by having access to all these tack drivers. Your average hunter is lucky to be able to afford even your Browning A-bolt. Your average infantryman has to make do with the M -16 or something similar. You better remember that practical accuracy is what puts meat on the table, or the bad guy down."

Later that afternoon, Bill called, and asked Ron if he could make a delivery run, the lodges were starting to gear up for their busy season. Ron thought "Saved by the bell" and asked Bill what time they wanted the pickup. Then he told Bill he had to stop at the Sporting goods store and buy a bicycle helmet, or his mom wouldn't let him ride his mountain bike. Bill said that would work OK, since the delivery driver wasn't busy, and there wasn't anything perishable in the shipment. Ron figured he'd only need an hour to go to the sporting goods store and get back to the plane. He asked Bill if the delivery driver could be there at 1030 tomorrow. Bill said that would be OK and signed off.

At 0630 the next morning, Ron was winging toward Anchorage. By 0830, he called the tower, and requested landing clearance. He was on the ground by 0845 and in a cab by 0850. The store opened right at 9:00, and Dave was eager to help him, even if it only was a helmet. By the time he left, he bought the helmet, 4 spare tubes, a spare tire, a lightweight set of riding clothes that had a padded seat, and a set of riding shoes with a steel shank to spread the pedaling effort through the foot. They also doubled as lightweight hiking boots in case he wanted to park and check out something, or he had to cross terrain that was safer to walk across than ride. He got back to the plane at 1015, and the driver showed up exactly at 1030. He taxied over to the pumps, and topped off the tanks. After he made his deliveries, he flew to Allakaket to fuel up, then went home. When he got home, he showed his mom

the helmet he bought, and she approved.

The next day Ron filled his water bottles, checked the tire pressure, and got dressed in his riding clothes and shoes, then put his helmet on. He was a little wobbly when he first started since he had never ridden a bike before, but got the hang of it quickly thanks to Dave's suggestions. Soon he was peddling madly from the lake to the house and back. Anne didn't want him going out of sight of the house until he was a much better rider.

The next day he added his shoulder holster and fanny pack and tried it again. It didn't affect his balance as much as he feared. Then he added the fully loaded camelback, and that definitely increased his difficulty balancing. Then he remembered what Dave had said about keeping his center of gravity low - he guessed that was why Dave wanted to sell him the \$100 pannier bag set. Maybe next time he was in Anchorage he would buy a set. When he finally got tired of riding, he put the bike up in the shed next to the snow blower, and went inside to change and work on his studies. He was almost finished with his medical studies, and next week was his 15<sup>th</sup> birthday. The only thing he really wanted for his birthday was to see his Grandpa again.

Anne and Roy were going nuts trying to think what to get Ron for his birthday - I mean what do you get a 15-yr old Millionaire that lives in the middle of no where? A Ferrari? Roy had a hint when Ron was muttering about a set of panniers for his bike, so one day when Ron was out, Roy called Bill, who called Dave, and Dave said that Ron was looking at a set of \$100 panniers for his bike. Roy told Bill, who told Dave that Ron was complaining that his 30-pound daybag was messing with his balance. Dave said that would always be a problem, and the solution would be to get the bags. Roy ordered them on the spot, but asked Dave to be sneaky since it was for Ron's 15<sup>th</sup> birthday. Dave and Bill said they would work something out. Several days later, Bill called Ron and said he had some more deliveries, including a heavy box for his parents. Ron flew to Anchorage, and they loaded his plane, and he was back later in the afternoon, wondering what they had gotten him for his birthday - it felt like a weight set. The next time Ron went out riding, they opened the box, and took several boxes of bullets, Pyrodex, and primers out of the box. Dave had indeed been sneaky, since the bullets weighed a lot. The morning of April 11, Ron woke to a special breakfast, and his mom and dad singing Happy Birthday. Lucky decided that howling, even if appropriate, would get him banished to the shed, so he covered his ears as best as possible. Ron walked into the living room, and saw the panniers mounted on his mountain bike. He gave his Mom and Dad a big hug and thanked them

After Breakfast, he got dressed in his riding clothes, stuck his GPS and radio in his fanny pack, and loaded the panniers lightly to take it for a test drive. He was glad that they didn't get the front ones as well, since they increased the steering effort. The back panniers were a handful, but they were better than a heavy daybag. When he came back, he asked his Mom and Dad if he could load the bike up and overnight out near the Caribou meadows. He could easily cover 10 miles in an hour with his fully suspended Specialized Rockhopper. It would

only take him an hour or so to reach the meadow, maybe longer if he stopped to check the scenery. Anne suggested taking Lucky, and Ron agreed, since Lucky showed no tendency to chase or nip him on the bike, and trotted right along next to him about 4 feet away. They said OK, and he loaded the bike for an overnight trip, kissed his mom, and gave his dad a hug, and he was off. Lucky trotted right alongside, and Ron stopped halfway at the creek to refill his water, and give Lucky a rest and a drink since his tongue was hanging halfway to the ground. Half an hour later, they were moving steadily, and Ron dropped down to his small chain ring to climb the hill, but made it quicker and easier than walking. This early in the season, the meadow was deserted, but beautiful. He pitched his tent and gathered wood for a fire while Lucky took a nap. When it got dark, he boiled some ramen noodles in his canteen cup, and added several pieces of jerky. He took Lucky's bowl out, gave him half the dog food, then a canteen full of water. After dinner, they laid down in the tent and went to sleep. They packed up at first light, and Ron ate a chocolate bar, thinking he could eat when he got home. They stopped at the creek again, and Ron drank more water than he thought he had to, then watered some trees. Lucky had already watered half the trees in the forest by now, so Ron made sure he didn't water one Lucky already did, or he'd have to come back and re-mark his territory, slowing them down. They got home around 9:00 and Ron asked his Mom if they had saved any breakfast for him. Since the stove was still hot, she gave him a muffin, and made him some scrambled eggs and bacon.

Later that afternoon, Ron checked his e-mail. He had an E-mail from his uncle Steve. After he read it, he was whooping and hollering enough to bring his parents on the run. "Ron, what's going on?"

Ron pointed to the screen. "Steve sent me an e-mail. Barrett has a new prototype they want me to test at MacDill. Steve said I could stay with him at BOQ for 2 weeks to do a thorough T&E on the rifle, and the Air Force will fly me from Anchorage to MacDill in the General's VIP jet, and Steve got permission for me to fly right seat. They need me to leave tomorrow morning, since they need the prototype tested ASAP, because the military wants to order a bunch if they work."

Roy and Anne looked at each other, and shrugged their shoulders - what could they do? He did have a contract with Barrett to T&E their prototypes, and they were paying his way and giving him \$10K for 2 weeks worth of work.

Anne gave her son a big hug, told him to be careful, and have a good time. Roy was beaming with pride. "Son, just do your best, be scrupulously honest, and write a good report. Tell Steve I said Hi for me. Now go get packed."

Ron remembered something, so he called Bill. "Bill, I'll be in Florida for the next two weeks testing a new rifle. I won't be available for deliveries or flights."

"Ron, your schedule is wide open for the next two weeks. I'll tell anyone who calls you're

not available, and schedule them for 2 weeks later.”

“Bill, you better make that at least 16 days, to allow for travel time, etc.”

“Ok Ron, have fun and see you in when you get back.”

Ron spent the rest of the day getting ready, then sent Steve a quick urgent e-mail, asking him if he should bring the other Barretts to do a side-by-side comparison. Steve thought it was an excellent idea, and told him to bring the Barretts, and as much ammo as he needed. Lake City had done a huge run of the ammo, and they had 20 cases of the ammo for his gun on base. Ron replied that since the ammo was so heavy, he'd use their ammo. Steve replied that they could provide all the ammo, and to just bring the gun. Ron finished packing, and remembered to leave room in his luggage for his fanny pack and shoulder holster, since he highly doubted the Air force would let him carry a double shoulder holster or a 14 inch Bowie knife aboard the aircraft on his person. Ron checked around, and they had plenty of wood to last several months, and Lucky would be OK without him. When he finished packing, he had 1 suitcase, and the Pelican case containing the Barretts rifle. He had kept his BDUs from his last trip, and felt they would be the best clothes to wear on base, so he wouldn't cause any disruptions.

The next day, he was ready to fly at 0600. His Mom gave him a bag full of muffins, a thermos of coffee, and a big hug. Roy gave him a big hug, and prayed over him, then Ron was out the door. The Pelican case weighed a ton, so it took him a while to get it to the plane, and into the passenger door. When he finished, he did a walk-around, and then climbed aboard and started the engine. As soon as the engine was warmed up, he set the GPS for Elmendorf, taxied to the end of the lake, and took off. 2 hours later, he was landing at Elmendorf AFB. He taxied right up next to the VIP plane, and an airman checked his ID, then loaded his baggage aboard, being very careful with the Pelican case. Evidently his CO had told him if that case was even scratched, he would spend the rest of his military career in Reykjavik Iceland, which made Elmendorf seem like a tropical paradise.

The crew chief welcomed Ron aboard, and held the cabin door open for him. The pilot shook his hand, and told him to take the right hand seat. As soon as he was strapped in, and his headset plugged in, the pilot did the pre-flight checklist, telling Ron what he was doing while he was doing it. Finally, he said “Starting one” and a minute later “Starting two”. With the 2 big Rolls Royce engines turning, he quickly performed the rest of the checklist. “Ok Ron, we're ready to take-off, all we need is clearance.” He called the tower, who gave him clearance as soon as he reached the runway. Hearing this, the pilot bumped the throttles up to taxi faster, and when he got to the runway, he called the tower “Turning”. All he got back was a “Roger”. He shoved the throttles to full, and still had almost half the runway left when they were airborne. The pilot cleaned up the plane as soon as they were airborne, raising the gear and the flaps, and accelerated to over 400 knots. He cruise climbed to 30,000 feet, and set a course for MacDill AFB in Florida. As soon as they were straight and

level, he asked Ron if he wanted to take the controls. Of course Ron said yes, then as soon as Ron had his hands and feet on the controls, the pilot called “Co-pilot’s plane” and Ron replied “I got it.” For the next couple of hours Ron flew the plane, even though they could just as easily have engaged the autopilot. Finally the pilot called “Pilot’s plane” and then engaged the autopilot.

“Ron, you seem to be doing even better than last time.”

“For the last 8 months, I’ve been flying a DeHaviland Otter with a Commercial Pilot’s license.”

“You’re awfully young to have a Commercial Ticket.”

“I know, my recently deceased Grandpa used to do all the commercial flying for Allakaket Alaska and the surrounding hunting lodges, but he developed severe Arteriosclerosis to the point that he couldn’t safely fly, so the FAA waived the age requirement since I already had enough stick time to get my private pilot’s license, and there wasn’t anyone available.”

“You said Allakaket, that’s in Central Alaska. I guess you’ve made a lot of water landings.”

“I’d say 80-90% of my landings have been water landings, and my home lake is as long as the main runway at Elmendorf is wide.”

“You’re kidding, that runway is barely 500 feet wide.”

“Yup, Jim told me landing on water under those conditions is kind of like catching the 3 wire on an Aircraft carrier in the dark with no go-around.”

“How come?”

“Most of the lakes are surrounded by high ground. My home lake has a 500-foot obstruction less than a mile away from the runway.”

“Yikes, that would give me nightmares.”

“Flying bush is some of the toughest civil flying you can do, but the most fun. Almost all the bush pilots fly stick and rudder with a magnetic compass and an altimeter.”

The pilot looked around the cockpit, and imagined flying without all those instruments to guide him. He knew it would be fun, but very demanding.

“Last summer, I installed a hand-held GPS receiver in my plane, with an external antenna. It made things much easier since I can fly point to point as long as I enter the waypoints

beforehand. Magnetic compasses are notoriously unreliable that far North. Last summer, the GPS unit saved my life when I flew too close to a thunderstorm I never saw, and got caught in a downdraft, and flew off course into a low-visibility situation to recover some altitude. I was lost and disoriented. If it weren't for the compass rose display on the GPS telling me where Allakaket was, I might have gotten hopelessly lost and flew into a mountain."

"That sounds like a real scary event. I'm glad I have all this advanced navigation equipment. I've got a GPS unit too, but it's connected to the plane's computer, and shows where I am on a moving map display, and where I need to go, and even warns me of high terrain if I fly low enough for the terrain to be a threat."

"Wow, that sounds like a really neat piece of gear. Can I see it?"

"It's right in the middle of the console between us. The one that looks like a TV. The moving cross is this plane, and the terrain is moving underneath us. With this gear, I can safely fly right on the deck in IFR conditions if I have to."

"How much does that cost?"

"I've heard figures ranging from 10 to 50 thousand dollars each."

"I think I'll stick with my \$500 GPS."

"That's a good idea. You probably are very familiar with the area you fly over, but we can get assigned to fly anywhere in the world at a moment's notice, so we don't have the luxury of being familiar with the territory. This is only the second time I've flew to Elmendorf. We normally fly VIPs from DC to MacDill, or fly the JSOC to meetings with his European counterparts."

"That must be exciting?"

"It's about as exciting as watching concrete harden, but the pay's good, and in 10 years, I can get a job with a major airline making in excess of 100 grand a year."

"I made 60 thousand last year flying hunters and deliveries."

"You're Kidding."

"Nope, hunters pay top dollar to fly from Anchorage to their hunting lodges. I usually flew 2 round-trips a day from Anchorage to the lodges for the summer and early fall. I made 500-1,000 dollars per day."



“Kid, maybe I’m in the wrong racket.”

“If you’re a really good stick and rudder pilot, you can make a lot of money flying bush, but it’s a lot more dangerous than flying for United. My oldest uncle died in a plane crash when a downdraft flew his plane right into a lake.”

“In that case, I think I’ll stick to the friendly skies. So what brings you to MacDill?”

“I’m working on a T&E project for Barrett. Steve Fellows is my uncle.”

“You mean Colonel Steve Fellows?”

“Yes sir - that’s him.”

“That explains why they sent a VC-120 all the way from MacDill to pick you up. Must be nice to have low friends in high places?”

“Actually, it’s a two-edged sword. He’s greased the skids for me to go to the Academy in a couple of years.”

“No kidding, I’m an Academy Grad too - any ideas what you want to do?”

“I’d like to fly the F-15 Strike Eagle.”

“Me too kid, but there’s 10 times more applicants than planes, what would your backup plan be?”

“They want me for the Air Force Shooting team, that’s why I’m doing a T&E for Barretts; I’ve got this God-given gift for long-distance shooting.”

“Amen, I know what you mean; I know that my flying talent comes from God, because I could never do what I do on my own.”

“My Grandpa Jim told me a Pilot needs 3 things: 1) Faith in God 2) Faith in Himself and 3) Faith in his plane. If he loses any 1 of those three, he shouldn’t fly.”

“Exactly. Flying has definitely improved my faith in God. OK, we need to check in and get ready to land. MacDill Control, this is Flight #458, requesting clearance.”

“Roger, runway 27 left, taxi to VIP terminal.”

“Acknowledge 27 left to VIP terminal.”

The pilot flipped a switch, and the flaps deployed, and he reduced the throttles to landing speed. 15 minutes later, they made a perfect 2-point landing, and taxied to the VIP terminal. Steve was waiting with his Hummer, and the VC-120 taxied right up to it. The pilot shut down his engines, shook Ron's hand, and said "See you on the return trip. Thanks for the conversation, and good luck." The crew chief deployed the air stairs, and Ron walked down to the waiting arms of his uncle. "Ron, I'm glad you made it. How was the flight?"

"Great, they allowed me to fly right seat the whole trip." Steve knew this, but was glad Ron had a good time. The airman unpacked Ron's bags, and Steve was pleasantly surprised when Ron only had 2 bags: A suitcase and the Pelican case containing his Barretts prototype. Evidently Ron was here for business, just as Steve hoped. He drove to the BOQ, and Ron carried his gear into Steve's room. Someone had already set up a cot and footlocker for Ron, who saw the footlocker, and put his clothes in it, then he changed into his BDUs. Ron asked Steve if they could go to the range, and if the new Prototype was there yet. Steve said the range master had everything set all ready, and was ready any time he was. Ron said, "Let's go" and carried his cased Barretts to Steve's Hummer. They drove to the range, and Ron met with the Range master, and the Barretts tech rep who was conducting the T&E. He must have been forewarned about Ron's age, since he said nothing other than "Nice to meet you" and asked him if he were ready. Ron nodded his head, and the Tech Rep uncased the new prototype, and went through a canned speech about the new features. The main difference between the "new" and "old" prototypes was the addition of a suppressor. While it wouldn't suppress all the sounds of firing a hypersonic bullet, it did several things the military was extremely interested in: 1) It eliminated muzzle blast and signature, 2) It eliminated the recoil associated with the muzzle blast more effectively than a brake and 3) Modified the sound signature of firing to the point that unless someone was in a position to hear the supersonic crack, they might not recognize the sound of firing, and even if they did hear the crack, they would think the shooter was 90 degrees from where they actually were. Since the range of the BMG .50 Barrett's rifle is over a mile, it would make a very effective long range weapon since the suppressor did an excellent job of hiding the shooter's position. Shooting with the previous muzzle brake actually magnified the blast by re-directing it to the side, causing a large disturbance of dirt and dust around the firing position. The Tech Rep explained that this gun has only been function fired, and the scope boresighted. When he uncased the new prototype, Ron immediately noticed the scope mount was twice as high as the previous scope mount in order to clear the suppressor. He asked the Tech Rep about it, and explained the parallax problem would resolve itself well before the minimum effective range of the BMG 50 round since the bullet wasn't fully stabilized until it had traveled 200 yards, and by 300 yards, the parallax was negligible. Ron accepted the Tech Rep's explanation, but still wanted to verify it during testing. He asked for a chronograph with a remote display, and had the Range Master set it up 20 feet in front of his shooting position, and to set it up carefully so he wouldn't accidentally shoot the sky screens since the scope's line of sight was over 3 inches above the line of bore. Ron was glad to see the adjustable cheekpiece on the MacMillan stock, and took his time adjusting the stock to fit him exactly with the tools enclosed in the test kit. When he was satisfied with the fit of the gun, he dry

fired a dozen times to get a feel for the trigger break, then set the bipod and monopod so the scope was fixed on the bullseye 1,000 yards away. The tech rep handed him a loaded magazine of Lake City Match BMG 50 ammo, and the Range Master set up his high-power spotting scope. With the Bipod and monopod set-up Ron was confident his Point of Aim would be the same for each of the 5 rounds. Everyone checked their ears and eyes, and Ron keyed the microphone on his headset. “Gunny you set?” Ron looked over his shoulder, and the Range master gave him a thumbs up, so he chambered a round, steadied his pulse and breathing, and touched the trigger. The gun was maybe 10% as loud as the prototype. Gunny called him and said the first round was in the bullseye, but high and right 1 MOA from the bullseye. Ron didn’t touch the controls, and shot the other 5 rounds. They landed in the same area, but his group was almost 14 inches. As the target was replaced, he adjusted his scope so the next group should be in the bullseye, and the Tech Rep noted the changes. He checked with the Gunny, and chambered a round, then when the scope crosshairs were steady on the bullseye, he squeezed the trigger, and the Gunny yelled “Bullseye”. As soon as Ron settled down, he tried to put the other 4 rounds into the bullseye. 4 out of the 5 rounds were in the bullseye, but the 5<sup>th</sup> was a flyer. Ron knew that he was shooting bullseyes, and suspected the gun might have a problem. After the 10<sup>th</sup> round, he checked the printout of the Chronograph, and noted the velocities were 200 fps higher than his gun. He called the Gunny and the Tech Rep and pointed that out. The tech rep explained that all modern suppressors exhibit “freebore boost” from the smoothbore section of the suppressor, and the fact that the bullet is flying in a partial vacuum for a fraction of a second without the drag of the bore. Ron asked him what the twist of the barrel was, and he said it was 1 in 36. He asked what the twist of his prototype was, and the Tech Rep said it was probably 1 in 36. Ron tried not to sound like a know-it all when he told the tech rep that the extra velocity might be pushing the bullet beyond Lake City’s design specs, and could be inducing yaw, which would cause flyers. The Tech Rep asked Ron what the fix would be. The gunny chimed in at this point. “Lance, either you need to slow the twist or make the bullet heavier. Since messing with the bullet might cause other problems down line, like someone using the bullet in the wrong model Barretts, you’d be better off decreasing the twist to 1 in 38 or 1 in 40 to slow the rotation of the bullet, because the rotational speed of the bullet in rpm is a function of twist vs. velocity, and if the bullet is designed for 5,000 rpm, and you’re spinning it at let’s say 6,000 rpm, it could yaw or even separate the jacket in extreme conditions.”

Lance turned to Ron and said “Thanks, you’ve definitely earned your pay.”

“Lance, I’m not through yet - I think there might be a problem with your scope mount. It’s way high, and it’s just connected with 2 QD claws. Could you make a monoblock scope mount out of a billet of steel, with 4 claw mounts. Shape it like a Capital U, and leave just enough clearance in the hollow to clear the center of the scope, and make the mounting clamps as wide as possible.”

“Ron, that’s brilliant. I guess our engineers thought the existing mounts would be fine.

Your design would add less than a pound to the design, and there would be no way for the scope mount to flex, since the front and rear mount are one piece of steel.”

The Gunny spoke up, “We could fabricate something on base by tomorrow if Barretts gives its approval, otherwise it could take a week for Barretts to build and ship it.”

“Of course Gunny, I’ve got all the blueprints in my case. Let’s go to your machine shop and have them fabricate it. Ron, I’ll see you around noon tomorrow with the new scope mount. Gunny, I hope you’ve got the equipment to boresight this gun?”

“We’ve got the boresighter from the last prototype, the laser boresighter was a perfect idea.” Lance and the Gunny set off for their machine shop, and Steve asked Ron what he wanted to do. “Is Chief Simmons available?”

“I don’t know Ron, let me call.”

“Ron, he’s not only available, but told me to get you over there RFN.”

10 minutes later, they drove up to the gate of the SEAL compound. Chief “Bear” Simmons was waiting for Ron, who ran up to greet him as soon as the Hummer stopped. Bear wrapped Ron up in a bear hug, and lifted him off the ground. “Ron how the hell you doing? I’m glad you came back to see me.”

“Chief, I’m part of the T&E team working on the new suppressed Barrett rifle.”

“No kidding, wow - we were hoping someone would get on the stick and make a suppressed BMG 50 rifle.”

“Bear, it’s a real neat gun, but it’s not totally suppressed, since the round is almost hypersonic. All the suppressor does is control the muzzle gasses, reducing recoil and signature.”

“Even if it’s not totally silent, the enemy will never know what hit them, since the bullet arrives before the crack, and the suppressor will hide the shooter’s location.”

“I know, but the new gun has a couple of minor bugs. The freebore boost is pushing the Lake City rounds beyond their design specs, and inducing yaw; plus the high scope mount is causing some variation in the scope alignment. Gunny suggested they change the twist from 1:36 to 1:38 or 40. I suggested they use a monoblock scope mount.”

“Ron, that monoblock mount is ingenious. Some high-power target mounts are monoblock aluminum mounts, and they’re rock solid.”

“I’ve got until noon tomorrow - what you want to do?”

“I’m wide open, want to go diving?”

“I didn’t bring my trunks.”

“Not to worry, we’ve got everything you need.”

“Steve, is it OK if Bear and I go diving this afternoon.”

“Chief, can you have him back by 1800 for dinner?”

Bear saluted, “Aye Aye Sir.”

Bear saw Steve manhandle a huge Pelican case into the rear of the Hummer. “Ron, what’s in the case?”

“Last year’s Barrett’s prototype - they gave it to me. Want to see it?”

“You bet.”

Ron uncased the rifle and handed it to Bear. His eyes started watering when he saw the white feather. Ron asked him what was wrong.

“I met Carlos Hathcock right before he died. Someone must have really been impressed with you to paint the revered white feather on your stock.”

“I think Gunny the Range master had something to do with it.”

“Yeah sounds like him. How do you like the new rifle.”

“The suppressor is great, it takes the recoil from around my Browning A-Bolt .308 to my <skip> SU-16.”

“What are you doing with that poodle shooter?”

“It’s my plane gun.”

“You’re a pilot?”

I’ve been flying my Gramps DeHaviland Otter for almost a year. I got my commercial ticket 6 months ago, and I’ve been flying as an Alaskan bush pilot since then.”

“Holy cow Ron, all I did as a kid was steal cars.”

“I wasn’t too impressed by its accuracy either, but how many sniper rifles do you know that can fold in half, and weigh less than 10 pounds?”

“You’re right. The Military made a decision, which I don’t agree with, that a grunt is better off with a light short-range rifle that he can carry a lot of ammo for, instead of a heavy accurate rifle with less ammo. Seems the only service that emphasizes marksmanship is Uncle Sam’s Misguided Children.”

As they were speaking, another Hummer drove up to take them to the docks. Ron told Steve he’d see him for dinner tonight, and to please take care of his rifle. Steve cased the rifle, waved goodbye, and got in the Hummer since he had work to do. Ron and Bear drove to the docks, and jumped aboard the SEAL dive boat. Another SEAL was already aboard prepping the boat. Bear introduced him “Ron this is Hunter, Hunter, Ron. Hunter is the other dive instructor, and my swim buddy. If you’re OK, we were going to dive a deeper reef that’s much prettier. It’s just about 60 feet deep, but it’s got good stuff from 30 feet on down. You can’t stay down as long as 60 feet, but the view’s worth it. If you’ll get below, Hunter’s already laid out a pair of trunks and a 4/3 suit for you.”

Ron climbed down the galley stairs, and in the forward stateroom, there was a pair of SEAL trunks, and the same 4/3 suit he wore last year. 15 minutes later he was topside as they drove out of the harbor. He looked at his watch, and realized it was 10:00. He took it off, and was happy to note it said “Waterproof to 300 feet”, so he could wear it under water. Bear saw him looking at the watch, and recognized it. “Ron, is that what I think it is?”

“It’s my Uncle Ron’s pilot’s chronograph. I was checking to make sure it’s waterproof.”

“That looks like a Original Tag Heuer Specialist Pilot Chronograph.”

“Yeah, that’s what my mom said.”

“Take care of it, that watch cost more than most SEALs make in a month. We give every member of the Teams when they join a team the much cheaper diving version of that watch, and they cherish it, and I’ve known SEALs to pass their watches down to their kids in their wills.”

“My uncle Ron was wearing this watch when his plane crashed. My dad found it on his body when it washed ashore several weeks after the crash.”

“That sounds like a story I’d like to hear, we’ve got an hour before we arrive at the dive site.”

“OK, I’ll give you the Reader’s Digest Version” Ron told Bear the story of Roy’s getting stranded in Alaska by a plane crash, surviving the crash, and spending a year in Central Alaska all alone except for Oliver the wolf. Bear was impressed to say the least.

“I wish I’d have met your Dad, he sounds like a real man. I don’t think I could go hand to hand with a Grizzly Bear.”

“Bear, he just did what he had to do to survive. If he didn’t go hand to hand with that bear, he would have eaten him, and I’d never be here.”

“I’m glad he did then, because since I’ve known you, you’ve managed to renew my hope in today’s youth. I see all that goes on around the base, and the kids are lost, and don’t care.”

Just about then Hunter told them they had arrived at the dive site. They carefully anchored so they wouldn’t damage the reef below, and suited up. Bear helped Ron into his tanks and BC. Ron remembered everything, and they were quickly into the water. Bear reached up on deck, and grabbed an underwater camera, and handed it to Ron. “Here you go, enjoy. It’s a point and shoot underwater camera.” Bear put his regulator back in his mouth, and dove. Ron turned to follow, and after 20 feet, his ears hurt. He stopped, cleared his ears, then resumed his descent. At 30 feet, he had to stop again to clear his ears, and finally they reached 60 feet. This reef was totally different than the last one, for one thing, the fish were huge. Ron was taking pictures left and right, then wondered how many frames were on the roll when he shot his 24<sup>th</sup> shot. He spotted Bear and Hunter playing with a Manta Ray, and quickly got them in frame and took a picture. Half an hour later, he looked at his pressure gauge, and it was getting critically low. Ron got Bear’s attention, indicated he was low on air, and Bear gave him the “surface” hand sign. Ron added air to his BC, and started a slow ascent. 5 minutes later they were on the surface. Since they were only down ½ an hour, they were well within the no decompression limits. Ron surfaced within 30 feet of the boat, and swam over to the boat. Once Bear and Hunter joined him at the ladder, he let them go up first, handed them the camera, then Bear grabbed his tank to help him aboard. He practically lifted Ron on board, and he needed to climb fast to maintain his footing on the ladder. Bear helped him out of his tank and BC, then told Ron to go below and change while they rinsed off the gear. Ron showered and changed back into his BDUs, hanging the trunks and the wetsuit up to dry in the drip area that had obviously been built just for that purpose. When he re-emerged on deck wearing his BDUs Bear said that he looked squared away. Ron said that his uncle Steve had visited their cabin in Alaska, and he learned to blouse his pants and tie his boots with a knot from Steve. They talked all the way back to the dock, and arrived at 1530. Bear handed him the roll of film and gave him another bear hug, and said he hoped Ron could see him again. Ron promised if he had any more down time during this T&E session, he would look Bear up. A Hummer showed up to take Ron back to the Steve’s office, then they drove to the Officer’s mess for dinner. It was different than the VIP quarters, since everyone was in uniform. The food was good, but not as fancy as the food in the VIP quarters restaurant. Steve and Ron talked for a while after dinner, then went to bed.

## Chapter 89 - Trial by Fire

Ron woke up, got dressed, and joined Steve and his command for morning PT. He didn't lead the run this time, but ran along side his uncle. When they came back, he showered and changed, then they walked to the Officer's mess. After breakfast, Steve's cell phone rang. It was Lance, the Barrett Tech Rep telling him the monoblock mount was done, and Gunny was boresighting it. Larry asked if Ron could be at the range at 0900 instead of noon. Steve looked at his watch, and it was 0830, so he said "sure" and hung up.

"Ron, they've got the mount done, and are boresighting it, so they want you at the range at 0900 this morning."

"Great, I want to see if the new mount helped. Hopefully Lance contacted Barretts, and they are building another prototype with the slower twist, because I really want to fire the gun with everything right, and see just how accurate it is."

Steve drove the Hummer to the Range, and Ron was ready to go at 0850. Gunny was just finishing the boresighting, and explained to Ron how he was boresighting the rifle. Ron was fascinated, and as soon as he was done, Gunny handed him the rifle and 50 rounds of BMG Match ammo. They walked out to the range, and Lance was waiting for them. Ron set up, and loaded a mag, then put his ears and eyes on, and checked Gunny, who had his spotting scope set up, and was wearing his headset. Gunny gave Ron a thumbs-up, so he chambered a round. "Back to work" thought Ron. The scope was centered on the bullseye, so he touched the trigger, and was rewarded with a Bullseye. He pressed his PTT, "Nice Job on the boresight Gunny, the scope's dead-on." then he settled down and fired 4 more rounds. When he had safed the gun, Gunny said "Still got that flyer, I hope they hurry up with the new prototype."

Ron got up to talk to Lance. "OK, I think we've solved the scope problem, but it's still throwing a flyer. Any word on when you expect the new prototype in."

"They said they would have the new prototype in a day or two, so if you can hang around, I want your opinion of the new and improved Prototype. By the way, I talked to our Vice President in charge of Engineering, and he said you are definitely earning your keep. That suggestion about the monoblock scope mount saved us over a \$1 Million in R&D costs. If the new barrel fixes the flyer problem, they might make you a vice president."

Ron knew that Lance was kidding, still it was funny. Steve called Bear, and told him Ron had a couple of days handy, did he have any ideas. Bear asked Steve to give the phone to Ron. "Ron, it's Bear, Steve says you've got a couple of days handy. How'd you like to get your PADI open water cert?" Ron's smile could have lit a stadium "Heck yeah Bear, I'll have Steve drop me off."



“Steve, Bear’s going to get me my PADI open water cert, so I’m going to be with him for the next couple of days, so if you need me, you know where to reach me.” They jumped into the Hummer and drove over to the SEAL compound and over to the dock. Steve stopped right beside the SEAL dive boat, and Bear walked over and saluted Steve since he was still wearing his BDUs and rank insignia. “Colonel Fellows?”

“Chief Simmons, I’m leaving Ron with you for the next couple of days. Please leave a radio on in case I need to get in touch.”

“Sir, I have a cell phone as well with voice mail which might be a better idea.”

Steve and Bear exchanged Cell numbers, and programmed each other’s numbers into their cell phone’s address book. When they finished, Steve turned to Ron “Chief Simmons has my Cell phone number, and I’ve got his in case I need to get hold of you. Enjoy yourself.”

Chief Simmons saluted one more time, then they shook hands, and Steve got back in the Hummer and drove back to his office. Ron and Bear boarded the dive boat again, and Hunter was already working on the tanks, and getting the boat ready for departure. Once Bear and Ron were aboard, they made ready to cast off and get underway. Ron went below to change, and he heard the boat’s motor start, then accelerate as they pulled away from the dock, and into the channel to leave the harbor. Once he was dressed and topside, Bear started asking him diving questions. Ron was getting the PADI skills test, but Bear was administering it verbally since the rocking boat and spray made a paper and pencil test difficult. By the time they had reached the dive site, Bear had satisfied himself that Ron would have passed the written test. Now all he needed was a couple more dives. In order to maximize the number of dives, they had to be shallow, so he was going to several spots he knew that were less than 60 feet deep. They spent the next two days diving reefs and shallow wrecks. Ron had the time of his life, and when they returned to base 2 days later, Bear told him that he had earned his PADI open water certificate, and asked for an address to mail the certificate to. Ron gave him Bill’s address in Allakaket as a “Care of “ address, since none of the homesteaders had a mailing address. Bear then surprised Ron, and handed him the SEAL dive qualification medal, a pewter cast of an aqualung with the old dual hose regulator. He pinned it on Ron’s BDU, then gave Ron a big hug. Ron felt like saluting, but knew it was inappropriate. Instead, he said “Thanks Bear, I’ve had more fun and learned more in the last couple of days than you’ll ever know. I hope I get to see you before I have to go home again, but in case I don’t, please keep Steve posted if you get assigned somewhere else so I can keep in touch.”

Bear’s eyes watered up, and he wished Ron was going into the SEALs, but he knew it wasn’t to be, even though he was pretty sure Ron would have made a great SEAL. He was fearless, tough, and smart. Steve’s Hummer was waiting at the dock, and he noticed the SEAL dive qualified badge immediately. Bear was right behind Ron, and saluted Steve. “Colonel Fellows, nice to see you again. Ron is officially PADI qualified for an open water

cert, and since he also passed the SEAL dive requirements, I gave him my old dive badge.”

“As you were, Chief. Thanks for taking care of my nephew and helping him get his dive certificate.” They shook hands, then Bear gave Ron such a bear hug that he thought he might have bruised a couple of ribs. “See you later Ron, keep in touch.”

“Sure Bear, thanks for everything.”

Once they were back at Steve’s office, he gave Ron the bad news. “I know Bear gave you that medal, but you can’t wear it on a military base, since you’re not in the military. Could you please take it off and put it in your BDU shirt pocket.”

“Sure Steve, I understand.” Ron wasn’t happy, but realized a civilian wearing a Military insignia, even a dive badge, was a serious violation of military protocol, and he put the badge in his shirt pocket. Later that day, Steve made up for it by giving him a velvet box to put the decoration in. “Ron, I talked to Chief Simmons, and he said he would process the official paperwork for that dive badge, so once you graduate from the Academy, and become a commissioned officer, feel free to wear that badge.” That made Ron feel better. They went to the Officer’s mess for dinner, then before they retired, Lance called on Steve’s cell phone and told him the prototype arrived, so they would be ready for Ron at 0900 tomorrow. Steve gave Ron the good news, and they went to bed.

The next morning, Ron joined Steve’s command for PT, then showered, changed, and ate a quick breakfast at the Officer’s mess. They were at the range at 0850. Steve took Ron’s Pelican case out of the Hummer, and carefully set it on the bench behind their shooting position. Gunny was already set up, including a case of .50 BMG Match ammo next to the new prototype. Ron set the bipod and monopod, but didn’t have to make any adjustments, since the stock was still adjusted for him. He steadied his breathing, and started reciting the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm. When he came up on the gun and looked through the scope, the crosshairs were dead on the bullseye. He turned back to the Gunny, who gave him a thumbs-up. Ron cycled the action, and released the safety, concentrating on the target. He never realized he had touched the trigger, when Gunny yelled over the intercom “Bullseye”. Ron settled down, and concentrated on putting the other 4 rounds through the same hole. 5 minutes later, Gunny said “Ron, I think you just shot a 10-inch group. Let’s get some fresh paper, and see how far you can reduce that group size. Ron reloaded the 5-shot magazine, and each group got smaller, until he had shot an 8-inch group at 1,000 yards, the limit of the range. His next two groups were 9 and 10 inches respectively, and Gunny could tell that fatigue was setting in, since Ron’s group size was increasing again, so he told Ron that it was quitting time.

The 3 of them retired to Gunny’s office to write the T&E report. Since Gunny was the most familiar with the format, he was physically writing the report, but he put Ron Williams name on it as the author. He described the problems with the original prototype, and gave credit to Ron for suggesting the scope mount fix, and the group credit for the twist change

recommendation. He also included Ron's recommendation that they modify the other scope mounts for this prototype to a monoblock mount. The only other scope that would be mounted to the gun would be a 4<sup>th</sup> Generation night vision scope that they were working on. Unfortunately, it wouldn't be ready for a T&E until later that year, or early next year. For now, they would use the existing 3<sup>rd</sup> generation Night Vision scope, and alter the mount. Lance was so happy that he was practically jumping up and down. They had never had such a successful T&E session, where they found the bugs, and fixed them within a week. Lance was almost guaranteed a promotion out of this. Lance handed Ron a check for \$20,000 dollars, telling him the extra \$10K was a bonus for saving Barrett all that money in R&D cost. Ron was stunned, he had just received \$20,000.00 for basically 2 days worth of work, and a free trip to Florida. Lance said that they were officially finished, so Ron could go home any time he wanted. Ron thanked Gunny, and shook Lance's hand, then picked up his rifle and walked back to Steve's Hummer. "Finished already?"

"Yeah, and Lance gave me a 10 thousand dollar bonus for finding the problems and suggesting the solutions. He said I saved them almost a Million dollars of R&D work."

"I guess this means you'll be doing T&E for Barretts for quite a while?"

"Probably, I wouldn't be surprised if other manufacturers of sniper rifles didn't start calling."

"I guess that means I'll be seeing more of you."

"You might want to keep that cot in your room for a while."

They both had a good laugh, and Steve drove Ron over to the BOQ to pick up his bag. While Ron packed, Steve called the VIP transport office to tell them Ron was ready to go home. The officer in charge told Steve the bird was already serviced and fueled. They'd be ready to go in half an hour. 15 minutes later, Ron was packed and back in Steve's Hummer, headed for the VIP transport office. Steve presented the OIC the requisition for the transport, and Ron showed him his ID. Satisfied, the OIC had an airman grab Ron's bags, and carry them to the plane. Steve gave Ron a big hug and said "See you later." Then Ron walked to the plane. He was too tired to fly front seat this time, so he sacked out in the passenger cabin. When he woke up, they were landing at Elmendorf. Once the engines shut down, the Crew Chief lowered the air stairs, and Ron walked over to his plane, which had already been serviced and fueled. The maintenance Chief told him that they had changed the oil, tuned the motor, and filled the tanks while it was there since it gave some of the younger mechanics good experience working on a piston engine aircraft, especially an ancient WWII designed WASP radial. He said the service was courtesy of the US Air Force. Ron thanked him, and did a walk-around with the chief walking next to him. He was pleasantly surprised to see how thorough Ron was, just like a pilot who had been flying for 20-30 years. The airman loaded Ron's baggage, and when Ron arrived at the pilot's door, he turned and shook

the hand of the maintenance chief. “Excellent Work, Chief, please thank the maintenance crew for me.” He climbed in, started the motor, and it purred like a kitten. He gave the Chief a thumbs-up, and finished the pre-flight checks, then called the tower for clearance. They told him he was #3 for take-off, and to watch for jet wash and turbulence. He “rogered” the tower, and turned to taxi to the runway while he set the plane up for take-off, including entering the waypoint for Allakaket. When he reached the runway, he called the tower, who told him he was clear to take off, but to stay at or below 500ft AGL until he was 20 miles out, since the fast movers were out practicing. Ron decided that a take-off under ground effect was called for, so he set the flaps at minimum, and gunned the engine. Instead of hauling back on the yoke, he gently pulled until the wheels cleared, and he was 50 feet off the ground, knowing that there were no obstructions for several miles around the runway. At 1 mile, he climbed slowly to 500 feet at 180 knots indicated, and turned for Allakaket. At 20 miles out, he called the tower, and said “departing 20 mile restriction” and they told him that it was OK to fly at 2,000 ft MSL until he left their TCA. Ron cruise climbed to 2,000 feet, and an hour and 15 minutes later, he called Allakaket for landing clearance. When he landed, Bill was waiting for him. “That was fast. I wasn’t expecting you for another week.”

Ron handed him a check for \$20,000 and asked Bill to deposit it into his account. “I thought they were supposed to pay you \$10K?”

“They usually do, but in this case the extra \$10K is a bonus for quickly identifying and helping to fix several problems with the gun. Their tech rep said that I probably saved them over a million dollars in R&D costs to fix it.”

“Not bad for a couple of days work. OK, I’ll deposit this in your account. Are you OK to fly starting tomorrow?”

“Sure, by tomorrow I’ll be well rested.”

“Ok, tomorrow morning, you need to fly to Samantha’s house, and drop her off in Anchorage, she’s starting school there.”

“Anything else?”

“I’ll have some deliveries lined up for you when you arrive in Anchorage, so make sure you’re in Anchorage by 10:00.”

“Ok Bill, I’ll pick up Samantha, drop her off in Anchorage, and take a return flight full of groceries. I guess I should probably top off the tanks while I’m here.”

Ron filled the tanks, turned around and took off for home. 20 minutes from Home, Ron switched frequencies, and called his dad. “Hi Dad, it’s Ron, yeah I know I’m early, the testing session went great. I’m about 20 minutes out, could you open the hangar door?”

Great, I'll talk to you both when I'm on the ground. Me too, bye."

Just about 20 minutes later, Ron taxied up to the hangar, shut down, and unloaded the plane. Roy, Anne, and Lucky were there to greet him. Ron was glad that Anne had Lucky on a leash, because he was carrying a 20 thousand dollar rifle, and if he made Ron drop it, they'd have to change Lucky's name to Dead Meat. Once he put up the rifle, he kissed his mom, hugged his dad, and got mugged by Lucky "OK boy, nice to see you too."

Ron spent the next couple of hours filling his parents in about his trip. Ron was impressed that he got his PADI open water certificate. Anne was stunned when Ron told them he had shot an 8" group at 1000 yards. Anne's eyebrows went up a notch when Ron mentioned he was flying Samantha to Anchorage, but remembered that if his hands were on the controls, they couldn't be on Samantha, and if she wanted to land safely, she would have to keep her hands off him - Anne had heard from Jim about Samantha's escapades. Hopefully she'd meet someone at College, and give up on Ron. She just hoped Samantha wouldn't break his heart. Anne didn't know that she had nothing to worry about, Ron was more emotionally attached to Lucky than any girl. Roy was impressed when Ron told them that Barretts had given him a \$10,000 bonus. He wondered how long it would take the other gun manufacturers to find out.

The next morning, Ron was airborne at 0700, and at Samantha's by 0800. He helped her put her bags into the plane, then waited in the cockpit while she said a very emotional goodbye to her parents, then she climbed in up front. "Ron, I'm sorry if I've been ignoring you, I've only seen you once or twice a year, and now I'm off to college."

"Sam, don't worry about it. I'll always be your friend."

Sam said "That's sweet" and leaned over to kiss him on the lips. It was a soft gently friendly kiss, and Ron was greatly relieved that Sam had gotten over her "boy crazy" phase. He told her to buckle up and get ready for take-off. He taxied and took off, and 2 hours later, they landed in Anchorage. He helped her with her baggage, and this time she gave him a hug and a more aggressive kiss. This time he noticed she was braless, and hoped that she wouldn't have anything bad happen to her at school. She was a very passionate woman, but had led a sheltered life, and the combination could be dangerous around all those predatory males. He wished her luck, and taxied over to the gate where the delivery driver waited for him. He forgot all about Samantha, loaded the plane, and topped off the tanks, then took off to make his deliveries. He landed in Allakaket, topped off again, and flew home.

## Chapter 90 - What's Up Doc?

Later that afternoon, Bill called and told Ron that he was going to pick up Doc Richards at Anchorage tomorrow, and fly him and 2 of his hunting buddies to the hunting lodge. Ron was looking forward to the reunion, since he had stayed in touch via e-mail. The next morning, he was airborne at 0700, and landed in Anchorage at 0900. Doc's party arrived shortly after he landed, so Ron was able to get out of the plane and help load. "Doc, long time no see. I've got some excellent news for you. Those supplies you gave us saved an elderly gentleman's life. He broke his lower leg, and if it weren't for the D5W and morphine, he might have died from shock according to Doctor Miller."

"Ron, that's great news, but it was your skills that really saved his life."

"The best news was Dr. Miller put in a recommendation to the State that they make us certified Paramedics and supply us full Paramedic kits. I've got mine mounted to the bulkhead of the plane."

"Mind if I take a look?"

Ron took his kit down, and Doctor Richards looked at it with a critical eye, and made several recommendations. He said he would ship the meds and gear to them if the state wouldn't provide them. They put the kit back together, and Ron finished boarding them, and made sure the kit was secured before getting in the pilot's seat. Doc Richards got up front with Ron so they could talk. Ron taxied to the runway, called the tower, and received take-off clearance, then he programmed his GPS with the waypoint for the lodge.

"Ron, what's that - it wasn't here last time?"

"You're right Doc, that's a portable GPS receiver. I've got all my destinations programmed into it as waypoints, then as you can see, the compass rose display tells me which way to fly, how fast I'm flying over the ground, and how long it will take to reach my destination at that speed. It's saved me a lot of gas and time, plus once when I was lost after catching a downdraft, it helped me get back on course and land safely."

"How much does one of those cost?"

"Including the software and the remote antenna, I think I paid between \$500 and \$700."

"That's cheap. I was looking at a GPS unit from an instrument company, and they wanted several thousand dollars."

"If you don't need the moving map feature, the handheld unit with a remote antenna works

perfectly. All you need to do is have your aircraft mechanic install a cigarette lighter plug to power the unit.”

“Cool, I’m going to get one. Can you e-mail me the model # and where you bought it?”

“Sure, think you can afford it?”

Doc Richards realized Ron was teasing him, and they had a good laugh. He was looking around the aircraft, and noticed a new “black box”.

“What’s this?”

“That’s a cross-band repeater. I have a 2-meter handheld radio that only transmits at 5 watts. This repeater re-transmits my signal on the 440 band at 50 watts, so I have a 50-100 mile range depending on if I’m in the air or on the ground.”

“That would be a nice thing to have if I was near my aircraft often enough to use it.”

“My Mom used it to call Dr. Miller when Slim broke his leg, to get permission to start an IV and administer morphine for pain. She’s an RN, so that made it all legal.”

“That would be a really good use for an in-vehicle repeater, maybe I should get one too?”

“I’ll include the info on the repeater with the e-mail about the GPS.”

Doc Richards looked around, and spotted the case right behind Ron’s head.

“What’s that, you’ve got a bunch of new stuff since last time.”

“Doc, that’s what you call a “Plane Gun” in case I’m stranded somewhere, and I need something with more range than my .44 magnum. It’s a <skip> SU-16, it’s just like the AR-15 except it folds in half, and the foregrip becomes a bipod.”

“Well, I’ve had no use for guns, since I spend most of my time repairing the damage they cause, but I could see the need for one out here. You should see the hardware our guide carries. He’s got a revolver just like yours for bears, and a BAR 30-06. Makes me feel under-gunned with my little 7mm Magnum.”

“Actually, your 7mm Magnum has slightly better performance than the BAR, but they’re in the same class.”

“Ron you’re just a font of information.”

“Thanks Doc, but I just remember everything I read.”

“Wow, I wish I could do that. How’s Jim doing with his new medicine?”

Ron hung his head and looked like he would cry. “Doc, Grandpa Jim died a while ago, he threw a clot while he was flying with me. Dr. Miller said that the clot blocked his coronary artery, and he was dead in minutes. As soon as I landed a minute later, I started CPR, but the Doc said that he would have died regardless.”

“Ron, Dr. Miller’s probably right, a clot like that is usually fatal. Unless you can dissolve the clot in 6 minutes, he’s dead regardless of what you do, since without the blood circulating oxygen to the brain, irreversible brain damage results after 6 minutes without oxygen. I’m sorry it happened, but it’s one of the most painless ways to die, since you lose consciousness within 30 seconds from hypoxia, and you never wake up.”

“Thanks Doc, coming from you, that makes me feel a lot better. Oops, got to get ready to land.”

Ron cranked the flaps to full, and reduced throttle by 2/3, and they floated down to the lake. They touched down without a splash, and taxied to the dock. The dock worker tied the plane up, and as soon as the prop stopped spinning, he opened the doors. Doc Richards turned to Ron, and said “Ron that was the most enjoyable flight I’ve ever had. I think I enjoyed the flight more than I’ll enjoy hunting. I’ll see you in a couple of days.” He reached for his wallet, and Ron said “Keep it, you’ve done so much for us, I couldn’t take your money, besides Jim left me almost 1.5 million dollars in his will.”

“Wow, that’s a lot of money for a young man your age.”

“So far I haven’t let it go to my head.”

“OK Ron, take care and I’ll see you on the return trip.”

Ron waited until the dock worker closed and secured the door and released the rope holding the plane to the dock, then started his engine as the worker pushed him off with a pole. As he taxied out to the downwind end of the lake, Ron hoped Doc Richards would have a good hunt. He set the plane up for take-off, and set the GPS for Allakaket. After he took off, he turned for Allakaket, and when he was 15 minutes out, called the tower for permission to land. He taxied up to the pumps, and Bill was waiting for him with a big grin on his face. “Ron, Doc Richards was just raving about you, praising you to the rafters. I don’t know how you do it, but you can’t buy PR like that.”

Several days later, Ron picked up Doc and flew them back to Anchorage. They were all talking about their hunt, and when they landed in Anchorage, Doc Richards handed Ron a



sealed envelope, and asked him not to open it until they had left. Ron respected his wishes, and waited until they had entered the terminal and headed toward their flights home.

Ron opened the envelope and read:

Dear Ron:

I e-mailed the State Director of Emergency Services in Alaska about you, and he assured me that a more complete kit would be shipped to your location ASAP. He volunteered that it would be sufficient to fully stock both of your kits. I made several suggestions, and he agreed to upgrade kits statewide as soon as possible. Please continue your medical studies, even if you don't want to become a doctor, who knows, one day you might save my life.

Ron, I know you don't need the money, but my wife and I never had any children, and you're the closest thing I have to a son. Please accept this as a small token of my appreciation. Please keep in touch.

Sincerely,

Doc Richards

Folded in the envelope was a check for \$500 dollars, with a note attached suggesting that he do something nice for someone with it. Ron tried not to tear up, and thought that was a good idea. Since he was already in Anchorage, he taxied over to the FAA office, and asked to borrow the yellow pages. Dan walked up, and Ron asked him what the nicest restaurant in Anchorage was. Dan told him to try the Crow's Nest. Ron called and made a reservation for 2 tomorrow, then called the Inn, and booked 2 rooms for tomorrow night. He thanked Dan, and went out to his plane. He flew to Allakaket and gave Bill the check, then flew home. He told his Mom and Dad that Doc Richards gave him \$500 and told him to do something nice for someone, so he booked a romantic dinner for 2 for his mom and dad, and booked rooms at the Inn. They could spend the day in Anchorage, and he was paying for the trip and dinner. Roy hugged his son, and his Mom cried. They packed their bags, then flew to Anchorage the next day. They spent the day sightseeing and shopping, and when evening came, Ron put his parents in a cab, handed his Dad a couple of hundred dollars, told him to keep the change, and told the driver to take them to the Crow's nest. Ron walked next door to the restaurant, and ate dinner, glad he could do something nice for his parents. They met for breakfast the next morning, and Anne took Ron aside "Son, I'm really sorry I yelled at you the other day."

"Mom, it's OK, Dad explained your hormones are changing, and sometimes you have trouble with your emotions. I understand, and it's OK. Mom, I just wanted to tell you I love

you both, and Doc Richards gave me a good idea.”

“Remind me to thank Doc Richards later. That was the best present you could have given us. It’s been over 15 years since we were able to go to dinner by ourselves. Not that we don’t want you around, but sometimes a romantic dinner for 2 is just what we need.”

“Mom, any time you and dad need a night out, let me know. I can fly you to Anchorage, and staying overnight at the inn is cheap since I get the corporate rate.”

“Thanks Ron, you’re so sweet.”

They caught a cab back to the airport, and Ron loaded all the stuff they bought. Ron had spotted a deal on 5.56 JHP ammo, and bought 100 rounds. He had room in the Pelican case for all the loaded magazines, plus several boxes of ammo. Since the magazines were loaded with FMJ ammo, he thought the hollow points would be a good idea to shoot small game or 2-legged varmints, but the probability of that was about the same as him getting elected President of the USA. When they were all aboard, Ron got permission to take off, and headed for Allakaket. He topped off the tanks, then turned for home. After he got the plane unloaded, he reloaded his 10-round magazine with JHP ammo. Ron took his mountain bike out for a spin back and forth between the cabin and the lake, then they went fishing. Later that afternoon, Ron got a call from Bill. There were several packages waiting for delivery in Anchorage. Ron thought “why didn’t he tell me yesterday while I was there”, then remembered that if something came via Mail, it might have just showed up. He did say they were packages, not deliveries. He told his Mom and Dad that he had to fly back to Anchorage to pick up some packages tomorrow. Ron asked if there was anything they needed, and Anne said they had stocked up from the last 2 trips.

The next morning, he flew to Anchorage, and met the delivery truck. After they loaded the plane, and he signed for the boxes, he noticed a big huge box addressed to him. Since he already signed for it, he got out of his seat, opened the box, and there was another Barrett’s rifle, and a letter from the owner of the company.

“Dear Mr. Williams:

This is a token of our gratitude for not only an excellent evaluation of our prototype, but your efforts to solve the problems revealed. Thanks to you, our company saved millions of dollars in R&D costs, and was awarded a contract worth at least \$100 million for the new Barrett’s Suppressed 50. This letter transfers title to Serial Number 0001 to Ron Williams. We have decided to double your fee for all future T&E programs. The Vice President in charge of Product Development told me the new 4<sup>th</sup> Generation Night scope will be ready in 6 to 9 months. Please bring this weapon back to MacDill with you so you may test the new scope with the suppressed Barrett 50. Thank you and enjoy the new rifle.

ps: I enclosed another case of Lake City Match ammo so you can practice.

Sincerely,

Ronnie Barrett  
Owner, Barrett Firearms Manufacturing, Inc.

Ron read the letter, and felt like someone better show up quickly to pinch him. He now owned 2 Barrett's rifles worth more than most people paid for a new car. He packed the boxes back up, and was glad they had packed the rifle in a Pelican case, so he didn't have to worry about the scope getting dinged. He looked at the manifest, and entered the deliveries into the GPS as waypoints, then started the engine. He took off shortly after receiving permission, and made his deliveries. When he stopped in Allakaket, Bill was there to meet him. Ron showed him the letter and the rifle. Bill knew enough about rifles to recognize the Barrett's name, and realize the gun and scope cost over \$20 thousand. When Ron told him this was the second rifle Barrett's had given him, you could have knocked him over with a feather. Bill just shook his head and thought "Kid, you don't know how good you've got it." Ron put the rifle back in its case, and topped off the fuel tanks, then flew home.

He called his dad when he was 20 minutes out, and taxied right into the hangar. Roy was confused when Ron walked around the back to get the cart, and came back with a huge box.

"Uh Ron, what's in the box?"

"Dad, you're not going to believe this. I got a letter from Ronnie Barrett, the owner of Barrett Firearms Manufacturing. He gave me Serial # 0001 of the new Barrett Suppressed 50, with another Swarovski scope. Plus he gave me a case of the Lake City 50 BMG Match ammo in case I wanted to practice, except there aren't too many areas around here where I can set up targets a mile away. Also, they told me they would need me in another 6 to 9 months to T&E their new night vision scope, and they were going to double my fee."

Ron, you're right, I'm having a real problem believing it."

"Dad, here's the letter, read for yourself."

After reading the letter, Roy was still amazed. Ron earned \$10 Thousand for 2 days work shooting a gun that most people would have paid them for the privilege to shoot. Not only that, but they give him a \$10 Thousand bonus, plus give him the first production rifle and a new scope to boot. Roy was glad he was sitting down.

## Chapter 91 - Target Practice

Ron sent Steve an e-mail asking for help locating a long-range shooting area. Steve replied that Elmendorf had a 1,000 yard range just like MacDill. Steve's next e-mail told Ron he had sent an E-mail to the CO of Elmendorf AFB requesting permission for Ron and his family to use the rifle range for marksmanship practice. The CO talked to Steve's CO, and was assured that Ron was working on a classified military project that required him to practice shooting at ranges longer than 600 yards, which was the longest civilian range available. Besides, he was shooting military hardware in an ongoing T&E project. That clinched it, and the CO of Elmendorf AFB e-mailed Ron a letter granting permission for him and anyone accompanied by him to use the long range rifle range. Ron now had another reason to visit Anchorage. Ron made several copies of the letter, and stuck one in each Pelican case just in case.

2 days later, Ron received an e-mail from Gen. Gene Sheppard at MacDill, telling him that Gunny Richard Mathews was the range officer at Elmendorf, and he was cleared to know why he was using the range, and was willing to assist in case he needed a spotter, or other help. Ron replied to the e-mail thanking the General for his time and consideration. Ron called Bill and asked him if he had any business in Anchorage for the rest of the week. Bill said they had some routine deliveries, but they could wait. Ron told him he needed to go to Elmendorf AFB to test his new rifle, and could pick up the deliveries on his way back. Bill gave him the number of the delivery driver, and told him they needed a half hour notice for deliveries. Ron said he'd take care of it. Ron asked his Mom and Dad if they wanted to go shooting at Elmendorf. Neither one of them was really interested. Roy didn't have the energy, and Anne couldn't shoot that far, she thought her vision was getting worse, and was probably as bad as 20/40. Ron laughed, since most people her age would kill to have 20/40 vision. Ron asked them if it were OK if Bill went with him. They said sure, so he e-mailed Bill and asked him if he wanted to go shooting his new rifle tomorrow morning at Elmendorf, then called him and told him to check his e-mail. 5 minutes later, Ron received an e-mail in reply with only 2 words "Heck Yeah." Ron called Bill back and they agreed to meet at the airport in Allakaket at 0900.

The next morning after breakfast, Ron grabbed the cart and hauled the rifle cases and the ammo out to the plane. He hoped someone at Elmendorf would be nice enough to detail a Hummer to them. Just to be on the safe side, Ron sent an e-mail to the CO of Elmendorf advising him that he wanted to use the range today, and he referred to General Sheppard's e-mail. 15 minutes later, he got a reply that Gunny Mathews would meet them on the flight line with a Hummer, and be at their disposal all day. Ron thought, "I guess RHIP still applies, even to friends of VIPs." Ron knew he better not abuse the privilege since he was doing this as a favor to General Sheppard, since Ron wasn't even in the military. Ron grabbed his GPS and his gear, and went out to the plane. 2 hours later, he was landing at Allakaket. Bill got aboard, and Ron set the GPS for Elmendorf. Half an hour out, he

requested permission to land at Elmendorf. Evidently someone had told the tower about him, and he got the VIP treatment. As he pulled up to his parking spot, he could see a Gunnery Sergeant waiting next to his Hummer. When the Propeller stopped, Ron hopped out, and walked over to the Hummer and introduced himself. “Gunny Mathews?”

The gunny nodded, and Ron handed him his ID, and a copy of General Sheppard’s letter. “Mr. Fellows, this way please.”

“Uh, Gunny, this is Mayor Bill of Allakaket. I hope it’s OK if he comes along too.”

“No problem, the letter stated that it included you and anyone with you.”

Ron thought the gunny was a little stiff, and hoped he would loosen up when he got to know him. They unloaded the rifles into the Hummer, grabbed the ammo can and hearing protection, and hopped into the Hummer. He drove them to the range, and got out. They unloaded the Barretts rifles on the bench, and uncased them. Gunny’s eyes got as big as saucers. “So that’s what all the secrecy is about. I heard rumors that Barrett was working on a new BMG .50 rifle, but I’d never guess it was a Suppressed design.”

“Gunny, the rifle isn’t fully suppressed, the suppressor contains the muzzle blast and slows it down to the point that its much quieter, but it still exhibits the supersonic crack, so you need hearing protection. The military wanted the suppressor because it reduces recoil and masks the signs of firing so a shooter wouldn’t give his position away by throwing up a big cloud of dirt. I brought the other one for comparison, and I can tell you there is a night and day difference between shooting the suppressed version vs. the unit with the muzzle brake.”

“Cool.”

“Gunny, can we get some targets set at the 1,000 yard line while I get set up here.”

“Sure thing Mr. Williams.”

“Gunny, my dad’s Mr. Williams, I’d prefer if you’d call me Ron.”

“OK, Ron. I’d love to see you shoot this monster.”

“I assume you have a spotting scope, if you wouldn’t mind spotting for me, I’d appreciate it.”

“OK, any thing else?”

“Nope, I just came here to shoot. I appreciate you letting me use your range. I don’t have any 1,000 yard ranges anywhere else, and Ronnie Barrett gave me an extra case of Lake City

.50 BMG Match ammo so I can practice.”

Ron could see the runner returning, and Gunny broke out his spotting scope, then Ron made sure everyone had their ears on, and loaded a 5-shot magazine full of match ammo. He looked back at the Gunny who was giving him a “thumbs-up”, so he chambered a round. Ron took off the safety, and the bullseye was centered in the scope and not moving, just like before. He focused the scope, and made some minor adjustments, then got behind the gun and got ready to shoot. He took 3 deep breaths, and after blowing out half the 3<sup>rd</sup> one, held his breath and touched the trigger. He could see in his scope that he hit the bullseye, so he repeated the process 4 more times, then put the safety on, and left the bolt open to cool off the barrel.

Gunny said “Ron, I don’t know how you did it, but you just put 5 rounds in the bullseye, and I doubt the group’s much bigger than 8 or 9 inches. Let me send a runner to retrieve it so we can measure the group.”

20 minutes later (2,000 yards is a long way, even for a 18 yr old Airman) Gunny was measuring the group. The raw group measured 9 inches, and subtracting the bullet diameter (½ inch) Ron had just shot his second best group at 1,000 yards in his life. To say the Gunny was impressed was an understatement. “Ron, now I know why they’ve got you working on the T&E project, you shoot like Carlos Hathcock.”

“Gunny, take a look at the stock of the other Barrett.”

He opened the case, and saw that someone had painted a single white feather on the MacMillan stock. Ron explained, “They gave me that rifle almost a year ago, when as a 14 yr. old, I shot a 10-inch group at 1,000 yards in front of General Sheppard with that rifle.”

“Ron, talk about pressure. My knees would be knocking if I were shooting in front of a 3-star General.”

“I DID have to recite the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm twice before I shot.”

“Works for me.”

Ron shot 2 more groups that averaged between 8 and 10 inches. Finally, he asked Gunny if he wanted to try it. Gunny Mathews jumped at the chance. Ron was acting as a shooting coach, and helped Gunny adjust the unfamiliar gun to fit him. When they were done, Gunny got behind the gun, and looked through the scope, and everything was rock steady - dang this kid knew what he was doing. Ron handed him a loaded magazine, and stepped back. Gunny inserted the magazine and cycled the action, then released the safety. Looking through the scope, the image was dead still, so he moved his finger onto the trigger, and just touched it when the crosshairs coincided with the bullseye. Ron checked the round, and

there was a neat hole right in the center of the bullseye. Ron gave Gunny a thumbs-up, and Gunny kept shooting, with a huge grin on his face. He couldn't believe he had fired 5 rounds when the firing pin landed on an empty chamber. He locked the bolt open and set the safety. Ron was grinning too. "Gunny looks like you shot all 5 rounds in the bullseye, and I'll wager that group is 10 inches or less."

Gunny sent the runner again, who by now was tired of running. Eventually he came back with the target, and when they measured it, sure enough, gunny shot a 9.89 inch group. Ron said "Not bad for the first time with an unfamiliar gun." Ron looked at Bill, and asked him if he wanted to go. Bill said he was afraid he would embarrass himself, but Ron told him to shoot it anyway, it was fun. That convinced Bill, who got down behind the gun, and listened to Ron's instructions about adjusting the fit of the gun. 15 minutes later, the stock fit like a custom stock, and Ron handed Bill a loaded 5-round magazine, which Bill stuck in the magazine well, and cycled the action. Bill came through Hunter Safety instead of Military training, so he waited until he was ready to shoot to clear the safety. Bill looked through the scope, and the image was rock solid and centered on the Bullseye. He cleared the safety, said a quick prayer, and got into position. When he was totally comfortable, he did what Ron told him, 3 deep breaths, blow out half the third one, and just touch the trigger. The roar of the gun surprised Bill, but when he looked through the scope, he could see he hit the bullseye. He was amazed that he could hit the bullseye at almost 1,000 yards. He couldn't hit the broad side of a barn outside 400 yards with his hunting rifle. He remembered that the bipod and monopod effectively turned the rifle into a shooting rest, so it eliminated a lot of reasons for inaccuracy. His second through 5<sup>th</sup> rounds were on the fringes of the bullseye, but still when they checked it, he was amazed that he had shot a 12 inch group at 1,000 yards. He picked up Ron and gave him a big hug. "Thanks Ron, you're a really good shooting coach. I'll never be able to shoot like this again." Bill realized that 12 inch group was mostly the rifle, since it cost more than his Jeep Cherokee.

Gunny Mathews was all set to go brag at the Chief's club, then realized that this T&E project was classified. "Rats, I can't wait until this project gets de-classified so I can show the other chiefs my target." Ron took another turn behind the gun, trying to shoot smaller and smaller groups. His best group measured 7.5" He had fired almost 50 rounds when the Gunny suggested he pack it in, since his groups were growing again due to fatigue. Ron let the rifle cool, then repacked both rifles in their cases. Ron promised the Gunny he'd be back at least a couple of times a month, and he'd make sure the Gunny got to shoot the rifle, and he'd let the Gunny know as soon as it was OK to show his target to the rest of the Gunnys. They loaded the cases and the ammo case back into the Hummer, and then back into Ron's DeHaviland. The Gunny complimented Ron on his nice plane. Ron thanked him for letting him use the range, and Gunny said "Anytime". Ron and Bill got in the plane, taxied over to the runway, and requested permission to transit from Elmendorf to Anchorage. Elmendorf recommended flying a loop between the two airports that would add 20 miles to the trip, but would result in him being lined up for a straight-in approach to the main runway at Anchorage. Evidently, he wasn't the first person to request this transfer. When he reached

the end of the runway, he received permission to take-off, and contacted Anchorage Control, advising them of the transfer, and the route he intended to take. Anchorage acknowledged, and cleared him to land. Ron took off, and 20 minutes later, he landed at Anchorage, and taxied up to the correct terminal. Bill must have called ahead, since the delivery truck was waiting for him. They got loaded in record time, and Ron taxied over to the fuel pumps to fill his tanks, then called the tower for permission to take off. He programmed his GPS with the waypoints for his deliveries, and took off. When he finished his deliveries, he dropped Bill off at Allakaket, and filled his tanks. "This one's on me" said Bill, as he ripped up the receipt. Ron had filled both tanks with over 100 gallons of fuel, so he was surprised when Bill volunteered to pay for the fuel, but didn't argue. Bill said "You know Ron, this DeHaviland is going to need some major maintenance soon, so I'll have the aircraft mechanic make the Cessna ready for flight. He already installed the GPS you bought for Jim, and I'll have him install another radio repeater to match the one you have here. Even if it's out of the way, you should fly the Cessna when you can to save hours on the DeHaviland for when you have to haul heavy loads."

"Bill, you're right. Let me know when the Cessna is ready to fly, and we can coordinate so I'm only hauling passengers and baggage when I fly the Cessna, and hauling freight or other heavy loads with the DeHaviland."

"Ron, now you're thinking, between gas and maintenance costs, it's 2-3 times as expensive per flight hour to fly the DeHaviland as the Cessna. Like today, if you'd have had the Cessna, the entire trip might have used \$150 worth of gas versus almost \$300.00. Not only that, but your engine is due for an overhaul, and that will set you back several thousand dollars. The Cessna costs maybe 1/3 of the cost of overhauling the DeHaviland due to its much simpler engine. The Cessna can handle 3 passengers, and 500-800 pounds of freight or baggage as well. As long as the hunters aren't hauling a whole caribou back home, the skin, meat and head only weigh a couple of hundred pounds, depending on how they butchered and packed the meat. If they just packed the prime cuts, the entire package might weigh 150 pounds. If they made sausage of the leftovers, it might weigh 200 pounds."

"Good thing I'm a light skinny kid. That gives me another 50 pounds of payload."

Ron thanked Bill for the fuel, and got back into the plane, and got ready to take off. Bill was right, 2/3 of his trips could be made with the Cessna. The only problem with the Cessna was it was so much slower than the DeHaviland. Lightly loaded, it took 1.5 hours to fly from home to Anchorage with the DeHaviland. The Cessna could take over 2 hours per trip. That added a whole hour to his round trip, and if he made 2 per day, it added 2 hours. Still, with the GPS, he would make up time by being able to fly direct. He'd have to e-mail Bill and ask him to remind the mechanic to remove the dual controls from the cockpit, it would be bad form for a front-seat passenger to crash the plane by leaning against the yoke while he was trying to see out the windows. When he got back in the house, he found an e-mail waiting for him from Bill. He would be busy the rest of the week flying hunters in and out



of lodges. Tomorrow, he would be flying a group of hunters back to Anchorage, flying another group in to that same lodge, and fly another group from their lodge that afternoon to Anchorage, then pick up some packages for delivery in Anchorage. Ron would be busier than a 1-armed paper hanger for the next couple of weeks. Hopefully by the end of the week, the mechanic would have the Cessna ready to fly.

The next morning, Ron was up at 0600 and out the door at 0730 to get to the lodge by 0800. At 0759, he landed on the lake in front of the lodge and taxied up to the dock. They were waiting on the dock for him, and the dock worker broke several speed records getting them loaded and the doors locked, then untied the plane and pushed it off. Ron started the motor as soon as he was clear, then gunned the engine to a fast taxi to the end of the lake since he was in a hurry, and the engine was already at operating temperature. He pivoted into the wind, and punched in the waypoint for Anchorage, then pushed the throttle to max, and they were quickly flying, even with 3 hunters and 3 caribou. An hour and a half later, they landed at Anchorage with almost half an hour to spare. One of the hunters thanked him for the quick trip, and gave him a \$50 tip. As soon as the plane was unloaded, he turned and taxied toward the pumps, and when the tanks were full, taxied to the other terminal to pick up his passengers, while he programmed the GPS for the next lodge. He arrived at the terminal, and the hunters showed up five minutes later. He helped the skycap load the baggage, did a quick walk-around, and jumped in the pilot's seat. He gave them the Speech, and got clearance to take off, and taxied to the runway. Once airborne, he turned toward the lodge, and landed on the lake an hour later. He got another \$50 tip, thanked the hunter, and taxied to the end of the lake. 15 minutes later he was at the other lodge making a pickup.

1.5 hours later, he was back at Anchorage, dropping them off, then he taxied over to the delivery terminal, and the truck was waiting for him. One of the packages was huge, and addressed to him and his mom from the State of Alaska department of Emergency Medical Services. The rest of the packages were for people in Allakaket, so he could kill two birds with one stone. When he was 20 minutes out, he called Bill, and said he had packages for Allakaket, and he was going to be on the ground in 20 minutes. When he landed Bill met him, and unloaded the plane, leaving the box for Ron and Anne in the back. Ron filled the tanks while Bill unloaded, and when they were finished, Ron did a quick walk-around, and Bill told him he sent him another e-mail with his schedule for the rest of the week. Also the Cessna would be finished in a couple of days, and he could fly the Cessna while the DeHaviland was getting its annual major overhaul. Ron turned the plane around, taxied to the lake, and was airborne minutes later. He called his Dad when he was 20 minutes out, and taxied right into the hangar. He carried the box into the house, and when they opened it up, it not only contained the extra gear, but another complete kit and several Tyvek exposure suits and N -100 masks. Ron guessed that Homeland Security was distributing the exposure suits and masks, even though they weren't foolproof, they were better than nothing, and had no expiration date, unlike MOPP gear. There was enough gear for 1 complete set per kit. They even included another set of mounting brackets for the extra kit, so Ron could put the spare kit in the Cessna when he got it, so it would be quicker to switch planes, since all he'd

have to transfer was the plane gun, his spares kit, and his go bag. Looking at the supplies the state shipped, Ron realized he had enough to make another go bag, and asked his mom if she thought that was an idea. She told him to go ahead, so he made another entire go bag. Now all he needed to transfer between planes was the plane gun and the spares kit. He sent an e-mail to the Director of Emergency Medical Services thanking him for the supplies. He got an e-mail in reply stating that since he was a commercial pilot, he was authorized to bill the state \$100 per hour plus fuel and maintenance costs for any medical emergency flights he made. He would gladly make the flights for free, but if the state wanted to pay him, he'd take the money without complaining too much.

Ron got to bed early since he would be flying 2-a-day flights for the next couple of weeks. He remembered how tired he was last year, and decided to get as much sleep as possible. The rest of the week went quickly, then Bill sent Ron an e-mail that the Cessna was ready, so he flew the DeHaviland back to Allakaket and left it with the mechanic. Then he transferred the SU-16 and his spares kit to the Cessna. He took the GPS unit out of the DeHaviland, and connected it to the other unit from the Cessna, and with a few keystrokes, copied all the waypoints from his unit into the new unit, then tested it to make sure the waypoints were in the memory, and stuck the GPS back in the DeHaviland. Next he took out his 5-watt handheld radio, turned it on, and did a radio check with the tower. The repeater was working perfectly. Once he was satisfied that everything was working perfectly, he taxied the Cessna over to the fuel pumps and filled up. From practically empty to full only cost \$100, versus \$500 for the DeHaviland. He could get used to this. He called the tower and got permission to take-off, and flew home.

## Chapter 92 - Life in the Slow Lane

The next weeks dragged - literally. Ron had forgotten about the 60 knot speed differential between the Cessna and the DeHaviland. He felt like he should get out and push sometimes when he was flying the long legs back and forth to Anchorage. Finally, when the mechanic announced that the DeHaviland was done, Ron didn't care about the gas mileage, he decided that it was worth making less money on each trip to fly the DeHaviland full time and decided to put the Cessna back in the hangar, and just fly it enough to keep everything in flyable condition. He told Bill about his decision, and while he wasn't happy, Bill remembered that Ron didn't need the money, he had almost \$2 Million in the bank, and the mechanic had assured them the plane was airworthy. The overhaul had resulted in a slight gain in horsepower since the cylinders were all producing the same power, and the rings were fresh. Ron didn't care; he was tired of flying "Dumbo" as he had dubbed the Cessna 185. The first time he filled it up, he almost went back to the Cessna, then he remembered he had just about \$2 Million in the bank, and if he never lifted a finger again, he could live comfortably.

Right at the end of the hunting season, he was flying back from Anchorage with an empty plane, when he got an emergency call from Allakaket. "Allakaket Control calling Ron, Emergency."

"Control, this is Ron, go ahead."

"Ron, emergency divert, MEDEVAC needed at following coordinates..." Ron entered the coordinates into his GPS, and he was 10 minutes away. It must be hunters in the field, because it wasn't one of his waypoints.

"Control, Roger, ETA 10 minutes. Control, can you tell me what happened?"

"Ron, guide called with 3 GSW, 1 possibly fatal. Guide has basic first aid, and is attempting to stabilize. Doc Miller advises to transport immediately to Anchorage, since they probably need surgery."

At this point, Ron was glad he had the DeHaviland again, since the Cessna couldn't take 3 stretcher cases. He spotted the lake, and turned to land. "Control, I'm landing at the lake as close to the site as possible. Might lose signal on Aircraft radio, will try to maintain contact on 440 band Emergency frequency. If contact lost, will re-establish contact in the air en route to Anchorage."

"Acknowledged, will monitor emergency frequency. Tower out - good luck"

Ron needed to get down fast, so he slipped the plane into a steep right bank, since he needed to turn right to line up with the lake. 30 seconds later, he was flying above the treetops, cranking

the flaps out like mad, and chopping the throttle to idle. It wasn't one of his prettiest landings, but he was down fast and in one piece. A flash of light struck the windshield, and he hoped it was the guide signaling him, since he turned toward it. The lakeshore looked flat and stable enough to taxi up onto, and he was parked 50 feet away from the frantically working guide. He grabbed his kit on the way out and ran to them. He could see that one of the hunters was bleeding out from a thigh wound, he could tell by the color of the blood that the femoral artery was involved. He was ashen, and probably already lost too much blood. One of the victims had a non-life threatening gunshot wound to the left shoulder, and the other one had a critical gunshot wound to the chest. He grabbed a Thoroseal and a Heimlich Valve, and told the guide to put the thoroseal on his back, and the valve on his front, and tape them in place, but make sure he didn't interfere with the valve. He grabbed a piece of 1" rubber tubing, and tied it above the wound as high on the thigh as he could, at this point, the choice was the leg or the life. He had never inserted an IV before, but remembered his mom's instructions to aim for the center of the vein, and when you feel the pop, you're in. He slid the catheter into the vein at the elbow since it was the easiest to hit, and got it right the first time. He quickly attached the other end to a bag of Ringers, and set the flow to wide open. He stuck the bag under the victim's shoulder, and went to check on the guy with the punctured lung. He was breathing better, but Ron went and grabbed the oxygen. He would have loved to set it to FLOOD, but they had an hour ahead of them, so he set it to 4 liters per minute, and placed the mask over his face. By now the guide was bandaging the shoulder wound. The guy was in a lot of pain, but conscious. Ron asked "Are you allergic to anything?"

"No, but it hurts like HELL."

"I know, I'm going to give you a shot of morphine, and you'll feel better." Ron took out a 5mg syringe of Morphine, and injected it in his opposite shoulder muscle. He capped the syringe, and threw it back in his bag in a red plastic bag they had provided. Ron only had 1 stretcher, so the leg wound got the stretcher, and the other 2 were helped into the plane. The guide jumped in the back, and Ron handed him a preloaded syringe of morphine for the guy with the leg wound if he regained consciousness. He would have loved to give it to the guy with the sucking chest wound, but remembered that it suppressed respiration, and he was having enough trouble breathing as is.

He handed the guide his Trauma kit, and told him that he'd have to take care of the hunters while he flew the plane. He objected telling Ron he wasn't qualified. Ron turned to face him and told him "You're all they've got. I'll talk you through it."

He closed and locked the back door, then saying a quick prayer, climbed in the front and started the engine, then turned and taxied for the end of the lake. He switched the waypoint for Anchorage, as soon as he reached the downwind end of the lake, shoved the throttle to full, and left it there. As soon as the airspeed indicator indicated 85 knots, he pulled back on the yoke, climbed to 500 feet, and cleaned up the plane. With the flaps retracted, the plane quickly accelerated to 180 knots indicated, and he held it there, watching the engine temps like a hawk.

Obviously the mechanic knew his stuff, and the engine didn't heat up more than 20 degrees. He picked up his radio mike, and since he was still in range of Allakaket, advised the tower that he had 4 passengers, and he was en route to Anchorage. Next he flipped the radio to GUARD, and keyed the mike "This is Ron Williams from Allakaket with an Emergency Medevac flight. I have 3 GSW on board, 2 critical, requesting emergency landing clearances at Anchorage, and have the paramedics standing by."

"Roger Anchorage Control, acknowledge your medical emergency, Paramedics called and en route. Please advise your ETA."

Ron looked at his GPS, and it said he was 45 minutes out.

"Anchorage Control. I'm 45 minutes out, at 500AGL."

"Roger, maintain altitude, you have Emergency Clearance for Runway 1"

Ron yelled to the guide "We're 45 minutes from Anchorage, how are they doing?"

"Ron, I'm Jim, the leg is still with us, the chest is having problems breathing, and the shoulder is unconscious but breathing."

"OK, get a pulse and BP on the leg if you can without disturbing the chest, or moving the leg."

"Ok Ron, I'll let you know."

A couple of minutes later, Jim said "Ron, BP 60/90, pulse thready but there."

"OK, Jim, we've done all we can for the leg, concentrate on the chest wound. Make sure the injured lung is lower than the healthy lung, we don't want him bleeding into his good lung and compromising his breathing."

"Ron, his right lung was the one shot, and he's practically laying on his right side."

"Great, keep him comfortable, but don't let him lay on his left side."

"Anchorage Control, 10 minutes out."

"Roger, Ok Ron, we've cleared the airspace around you, come in straight and hot, you've got 3 miles of runway to use."

"Control, I've never flown a fast approach."

"Roger - I'll talk you through it. Come in at 50 feet AGL, Don't touch the flaps, when you're over the runway, chop your throttle, and keep the nose on the horizon; you'll sink right down to

the runway as the speed bleeds off. Don't let the nose drop, and don't pull back or you'll stall and crash."

Tower, Acknowledge. Lowering landing gear now, 5 minutes out."

Once the gear was down and locked, the plane slowed slightly, and he dropped down to 50 feet AGL. Once he had cleared the fence, he looked for the landing threshold of the runway, and as soon as he was over it, he chopped his throttle to idle, and held the plane straight and level. Just as the Air Traffic Controller told him, the plane mushed down to the ground, flew in ground effect for a second, and as he lost even more speed, it settled on the runway. He didn't touch the controls, just kept the plane in the center of the runway. He was still fast enough that if the prop was spinning instead of providing drag, the plane would be flying. Finally the speed dropped below 80 knots, and he eased the nose forward so he had steering control. As he reached the end of the runway, he saw a huge mass of flashing lights, and raised his toes up on the rudder pedals to use the brakes. The plane slowed to a stop 50 feet from the emergency vehicles, and the propeller spun to a stop. The plane was mobbed by paramedics and firefighters, who packaged the injured and hustled them out to the waiting paramedic ambulance. One of the firefighters was talking to Ron, when he remembered something. He grabbed one of the paramedics and told him the guy with the shoulder wound was given 5mg of morphine IM.

"Who the hell are you?"

Ron pulled out his wallet, and his State of Alaska Paramedic card.

"Hi, I'm Ron Williams, and those guys are my patients - take good care of them."

"Roger, you got them here alive; we'll take it from here."

The City of Anchorage Paramedic Department has Advanced Life Support capabilities, and the gunshot victims were treated with the latest ALS gear available. The senior paramedic was wondering what he would do without all the advanced gear in his paramedic ambulance. The IV looked crude, but it worked. What really freaked him out was the kid with the paramedic card couldn't be more than 17. He wanted to talk to his supervisor, and see if they could get this kid some better training. He had saved 3 lives with minimal training and gear, and he wasn't sure that he could have done any better, even with his 20 years of experience. Thinking ahead, he called the fire department, and asked them to transport the pilot and guide to the hospital in their vehicle, just in case. He knew they were fine; he just wanted to talk to them when he wasn't up to his eyeballs trying to save someone.

As soon as they got the call, the Scene Commander said that they had to go to the hospital. Ron felt fine, but didn't argue. He pulled the plane forward into the nearest parking spot, secured it, and carried his trauma bag with him to the truck. A fireman/EMT drove them to the hospital,

and when they got there, the Senior Paramedic was waiting for them.

“Ron, sorry about yelling at you back then. You guys saved all 3 of them. Do you have a minute; I’d like to debrief you.”

Sure, I’ll tell you everything that happened, but Jim took care of them before I got there, and monitored them once we were airborne. I think he belongs there too.”

“Ok, let’s all go to the conference room right over here - you want anything to drink?”

They both said “Coffee, Black with sugar”

The seats in the conference room were comfortable and they all sat at a big table.

The senior paramedic came back with 2 coffees, put them on the table, and brought out his microcassette recorder. “OK if I tape this, I take lousy notes.”

They both said OK rather reluctantly.

“OK, let me start by saying my name is Steve, and you’re not under investigation here. I just wanted to know what happened, since I’m the senior paramedic for Anchorage. I have a few ideas for a training program for rural paramedics, and your incident report just might be the thing to convince the county and the state to come up with the funds to implement my plan.”

“OK, first of all your names for the record. OK, Ron, you first.”

“Ron Williams, Commercial Pilot and Paramedic, Allakaket Alaska.”

“Jim Roberts, Guide, Allakaket Alaska.”

“OK, from the top. Jim, you were first on scene, what happened.”

“These 3 hunters were chasing the same caribou in heavy brush, and it turned back into the brush. 2 hunters were on 1 side and the other was on the other side. They each heard movement, and thinking it was the caribou, shot at the sound, striking each other. I was maybe 50 yards away, looking at another caribou when I saw them shoot each other. I ran up to them and did what I could with my limited knowledge and first aid kit. 10 minutes later, Ron shows up with his Paramedic kit, throws 2 chest seals to me, and told me to put the one with the valve on the chest, and the other on the back over the bullet holes. I cut off his shirt and applied them just like he told me, and the guy’s breathing started getting better. While I was doing that, Ron was working on the leg wound.”

“Ok, Ron, you tell us about the leg wound.”

“After I tossed the thoroseal and Heimlich valve to Jim, I turned to the leg wound. He was pumping bright red arterial blood out of the leg, and I knew the femoral artery was compromised. I knew it was the leg or the life at that point, so I used a piece of 1” surgical tubing above the wound as a tourniquet to stop the blood flow to the femoral artery. Then I started an IV with Ringer’s Lactate. He was unconscious, I skipped the morphine, since I didn’t want to make a bad thing worse. I knew with an hour or more back to Anchorage, he was expectant, so I turned to the guys I knew I could save after I’d done all I could for him.”

“Ron, had you ever started an IV before?”

“No Sir, My mom is an RN, and I had some really good medical texts. I saw her give Slim an IV of D5W when he broke his leg, and was going into shock, but other than that, just what I read and what my mom told me.”

Steve was impressed; this kid never had a chance to practice on patients, and had gotten it right the first time. They described the rest of the treatment and packaging the patients, and the flight to Anchorage.

“Ron, if I can get you some advanced training, and real-life practice, would you be interested?”

“Sure, as long as it didn’t interfere with my flying. I’m the only bush pilot for Allakaket.”

“Jim, would you be interested in more training, I know guides are required to have First Responder certificates, but as you can see, it leaves you unprepared, and facing life-threatening injuries with minimal training, and not even basic gear.”

“Steve, I’d love it if the State could set up advanced first aid training for guides, especially if they gave us half the gear Ron had with him. We don’t need the drugs, but those chest things saved that one guy’s life, and I’m not sure if I’d want to be responsible for sticking a guy with a needle.”

“OK, thanks both of you. By the way, you saved all their lives. The guy with the femoral artery might even keep his leg.” Steve got up and shook both their hands. Ron looked at Jim, and he was as wiped out as he was. “Jim, if you want, I’ll put you up in a hotel tonight and fly you home tomorrow, I’m too wiped out to fly.”

“Ron thanks for the offer, but I have a girlfriend in Anchorage. I could still use the ride home though.”

“OK, meet me in front of the FAA office at 0900 tomorrow.”

“Thanks Ron, see you then.” Jim shook Ron’s hand, and turned to leave.



Steve turned to Ron, and said “I’m off duty in an hour if you need a lift into town.”

“Thanks Steve. I need to dispose of the used Morphine Syringette, and if you could spare some supplies, I’d appreciate it.”

“Ron, just show your Paramedic ID at the desk over there, and they’ll help you.”

5 minutes later, Ron caught up with Steve. Suddenly Steve’s beeper went off. “Ron, you want to tag along, I’ve got a call.”

Ron followed Steve out to the rig, and he jumped in the back seat of the 4-seat cab. Steve’s partner jumped in the driver’s seat, fired up the engine, and took off like a NASCAR racer with the siren screaming and the lights flashing. When they got to the location, it was another “no code” call. Since the elderly on Medicare couldn’t get into the Emergency room unless they were transported by ambulance; they often fabricated emergencies when they just had a minor illness or injury so they could get a ride. The city had to respond to all calls, and it torqued Steve off since more than once, there was a true code call, and someone had died because their unit was busy on a “no code” call. If Steve had his way, the city would prosecute people for false calls, but the city did the politically correct thing, after all, you couldn’t throw an 80-yr old granny in the slammer for a stubbed toe turning into “chest pain”. They drove to the hospital more sedately, and after they handed the patient over, their shift was over, so they drove Ron over to the inn in the rig. Steve told Ron he’d like to talk to him some more, so Ron gave Steve his e-mail address, explaining they didn’t have phone service in Allakaket, just a 2-way radio. After dropping Ron off, Steve shook his head in wonder as they drove back to the barn.

Ron checked into the inn, and asked to use the phone. He called Bill, and gave him the Reader’s Digest version, telling him he was going to stay overnight, and fly the guide back to Allakaket tomorrow morning. Bill told Ron to save his receipts, since the hotel room should be reimbursable. Ron asked Bill to call his parents and tell them he would be flying back to Allakaket tomorrow. Bill said he would, then Ron said goodbye and hung up. He turned to the clerk, told her to bill his room for the call, and he needed an itemized receipt, since the State would reimburse him for his expenses. He walked next door, had dinner, then came back to his room and went to bed since he was exhausted. The next morning, he met Jim at 0900, and flew him back to the hunting area first, to gather his belongings, and those of the hunters, then flew him back to his lodge. Finally Ron flew back to Allakaket, and filled up the tanks, then flew home. He spent the rest of the day talking with his parents about what had happened. Anne was impressed that her son would try an IV without any formal training. He told her that the guy would have died without it, so he didn’t have any choice. Anne knew he was right, but what a way to learn. Most med students and nurses practiced on old drunks in the ER until they got it right. After they ate dinner, he went to bed, since he was still exhausted.

## Chapter 93 - Back in Training

The next morning there was an e-mail waiting for Ron when he turned on his computer. It seems their report kicked over a hornet's nest, and the Director of Emergency Medical Services was under tremendous pressure to upgrade care statewide, and had authorized Steve's program to provide training to Rural Paramedics that was a combination of Hospital training for hands on, and training by Air Force personnel in field-expedient medical care, since a Gun Shot Wound didn't care if it happened in a hunting accident or a firefight. The military had a couple of tricks up their sleeves to treat mass casualties in the field, and bring them home safe.

Also, the Registered Guides would be receiving advanced medical training at the state's expense. They could be trained to the equivalent of an EMT, with the statutory minimum of a First Responder certificate. They would then be issued kits that were appropriate for their skill level. Since the oil companies had recently expanded the Alaskan Oil Fields, the state was rolling in money, and could afford the program.

In Ron's case they waived the age requirement, but they had set requirements for a Rural Paramedic, including 18 years of age when certified, pass an extensive written test, pass a 2-week training period in a major hospital, and the written approval of the hospital's Director of Emergency Medicine. Ron replied to Steve's e-mail, telling him he was too busy during hunting season to take two weeks off. Steve sent a reply back, telling him that Ron and his mom could do their two weeks in Anchorage after hunting season, and the state would pay all their expenses, including 2 hotel rooms, a rental car, and Ron's usual fee for a round-trip from Anchorage to their home in Allakaket. Ron sent a reply telling Steve he'd give him as much notice as possible, but it would be at least 2 weeks after the official end of hunting season, since some hunters stayed at the lodges for a couple of days and went fishing, then flew home. Steve e-mailed a copy of the test to Ron, and asked him to make a copy for his mom. He explained that this was designed as a closed-book test, so he would trust them to follow the rules. Ron printed up two copies, and handed one to his mom, along with a copy of Steve's e-mail. When she finished, she saw that Steve had included his snail mail address as well, so she addressed an envelope to Steve and put a stamp on it, but didn't seal it, since Ron could use the same envelope. 2 hours later, Ron was done as well, so they stuck both tests in one envelope, and Ron would give it to Bill the next time he saw him to include in the next outgoing mail bag. Among his many hats, Bill was also the postmaster of Allakaket.

Ron was back to flying two a day flights, and continued for the rest of hunting season. Luckily nothing dramatic happened. Two weeks after the end of hunting season, Ron and Anne flew to Anchorage for 2-weeks of On the Job training. It was a refresher course for Anne, but it was much more difficult for Ron, but he gutted through it, and they both passed with flying colors. At the end of the 2 weeks, Steve handed them their Alaska Paramedic pins, patches, and badges. Ron didn't want to sew a patch onto each shirt he owned, so he pinned the pin on his shirt, and slid the badge into his wallet. The badge was actually a plastic ID card with a magnetic strip

across the back, with his ID number encrypted into it. Anne's badge had the additional line on it certifying her as a Flight Nurse, since she was still an Alaskan Registered Nurse. Naturally the press was there at the ceremony, and they got their pictures in the paper. The associate editor of the Anchorage Press was there with a photographer, and cornered them for an interview after the photo op. They agreed to sit down in his office for an extended interview. 2 hours later, Scott had the story of the year. Next week's edition of the Anchorage Press would be a feature on Ron Williams, and his amazing story. Anne and Roy were featured prominently when Scott asked Anne a couple of background questions, and got more information than he bargained for. He went to the archives, and found out that this story had never been covered in any Alaskan newspaper or magazine. If he milked it correctly, he would have a syndicated column at several majors. He loved Anchorage, but the newspaper couldn't pay what the big eastern papers could. If he landed a syndicated column, he could stay in Anchorage, and earn a 5-6 figure income just off his column.

Scott e-mailed them copies of his stories as they came out, and Anne couldn't believe the reaction of native Alaskans. She thought that their life was boring and ordinary, but most residents of Anchorage still had the Big-City mentality, and were fascinated by things that occurred in the rural central Alaskan wilderness.

Ron finally got an e-mail from Ronnie Barrett at Barrett Manufacturing; they were ready for him to test their new 4<sup>th</sup> generation Night Vision Scope. He contacted Steve, and made arrangements for him to fly from Elmendorf to MacDill. Ron told his mom and dad he had to fly to MacDill for a couple of days to do another T&E session for Barrett, and went to go pack. He hoped MacDill had a good supply of LC .50 BMG Match ammo, because he had almost shot up his whole supply from practicing so much. He was now able to shoot 10 consistent 7-8 inch groups at 1,000 yards without tiring. He packed his suitcase and his new Barrett rifle in its case, and flew to Elmendorf the next day, where he was met by another VC-120. This time he elected to ride in the passenger compartment and catch up on his sleep since they needed to test the new Night Vision Scope at night.

Later that afternoon, he arrived at MacDill, and Steve drove him over to the range, and after shaking his hand, Gunny took the new rifle, removed the daylight scope by releasing the 4 QD dogs, and installed the NV Scope, then boresighted it. Ron was amazed. The NV Scope had a 120mm Objective lens, and the rear lens was offset almost 3 inches using a Porro prism. The tech rep from Barretts explained that the exit pupil would be unacceptably high with a standard in-line arrangement, and their optical engineers came up with a couple of tricks to reduce the image losses from the prism. Ron said he needed to shoot it first. Larry said, "Exactly - the only testing this scope has been through is our shock/vibration torture chamber. It's never been fired from a live gun." With the scope boresighted, Ron checked the cheekpiece adjustment, and it was surprisingly close. Once the gun had been trial fitted, Larry said he would see them back at the firing range at 2100. Since it was 1300, Ron had some time to kill, and asked Steve if Chief Simmons was around. Steve made a few calls, and found out Chief Simmons was off-base on a training exercise. Hearing that, Ron decided he'd take a nap. At 1800, he met Steve

for dinner at the Officer's mess, then they drove over to the range. Gunny had arrived moments before, and 10 minutes later, Larry showed up. "Alright since everyone's here, let's get the show on the road." Gunny handed Ron a set of red-lensed goggles so his eyes would start dark adapting, like they would if he had been out in the field all night. No one used white lights from there on out. Gunny picked up the cased rifle, and Steve and Larry both grabbed a case of ammo. Gunny already had a target set up down on the 1,000 yard line, and several runners standing by. Gunny was using his daytime spotting scope, since the objective was almost as large as Ron's Night Vision scope, he was sure he could see the target. Steve and Larry set the boxes down, and started filling magazines while Gunny set up his spotting scope, and Ron set up the bipod and monopod for the Barretts. One nice thing about the suppressor was that the muzzle flash from shooting a rifle at night would wreck the night vision of the shooter. With the suppressor, there was no muzzle flash, so the shooter could shoot repeatedly without ruining his night vision.

Once Ron was set up, Gunny made sure the range was clear, told Ron to close his eyes and keep them closed, then he fired a red flare into the air as a precaution in case someone was downrange that he couldn't see. When the flare went out, Gunny told Ron it was OK to open his eyes, and take the goggles off. Ron took the lens caps off the scope and pocketed them, then he pressed a recessed switch on the scope, and it came on with a slight hum. He slid in behind the scope, and looked through a Night Vision scope for the first time. Everything was monochrome green. "Gunny, the screen's green." Realizing that Ron had never used a Night Vision scope before, Gunny hurried to his side, and showed him how to use it. After Ron adjusted the contrast, the image on the screen improved greatly. He turned another knob to focus the image, and the target jumped into sharp focus. It was easier to see the target at 1,000 yards through the NV scope than the regular daylight scope. Ron realized the contrast setting was improving the contrast of the image, but sacrificing detail to do so. He noted that there was a huge range of adjustment for contrast, focus, and magnification, so that the scope would work in all conditions. Obviously this scope needed to be field tested by trained snipers in field conditions, and he knew he wasn't qualified to perform those tests. He could however, determine the practical accuracy of the scope before it went to field trials. After double-checking his settings, he turned to Gunny and yelled "Ready to fire." Gunny yelled back "Clear to fire." and Ron cycled the action, chambering a live round. The lit chevron was sitting right below the X-ring of the 1,000-yard target. Ron was glad for the lit aim point, and the fact that it wasn't crosshairs, which would obscure too much of the target in the dark. He cleared the safety, took 3 deep breaths, and let half the last one out, then touched the trigger. 2 seconds later, Gunny's excited voice came over the intercom "Bullseye". Ron fired 4 more rounds, then a runner was sent to retrieve the target. After Gunny measured it, he told Ron that he had shot an 8-inch group, and the first round was right through the center of the x-ring. Ron turned to Larry, and said "Congratulations, the scope is nice and accurate, and I see no accuracy problems with it. I'm going to check for repeatability issues, so it's going to be a long night."

Larry said that he had slept all day, since he didn't want to miss this. Once a fresh target had been put up, Ron grabbed another loaded magazine, and loaded the gun. After getting

permission to fire, she shot another 5-shot group, and this one measured 7 inches. Ron asked Gunny if he could try dismounting and remounting the scope to see if the QD attachments worked OK. Gunny and Larry said "Sure" and Ron carefully disengaged all 4 QD dogs, took the scope off, walked around for a minute, then laid down and put the scope back on the rail. It locked down just like it was supposed to. "Now the moment of truth" thought Ron, "let's see if this baby can shoot a 7 inch group at the same point of aim after being dismounted and re-mounted." Ron picked up another 5-shot magazine, and loaded the weapon, then asked for permission to shoot. 5 shots later, they brought the target back, and the POA had only shifted  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch, and it still shot a 7-inch group. Ron realized a  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch shift at 1,000 yards was infinitesimal, so the scope and mount worked perfectly. He repeatedly dismounted and remounted the scope, shot a 5-round group, and it never deviated more than  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch from the previous point of aim. He did notice that the groups were arranging themselves counter clockwise like the numbers on a clock. He thought that was odd, and assumed it was a harmonic. Still he remembered it for the report. At 2400, they finally ran out of ammo, and Larry called it quits, they had more than enough data. They conferred briefly to compare notes, and gunny also noticed the strange distribution of groups with repeated mount and dismount of the QD mount. They felt it was important enough to make the report, but had no idea what was causing the pattern of groupings since no one had done this before. Larry photographed the targets in sequence, then rolled them up in a map tube to let the R&D engineers figure it out. Anyway, they were happy with it, and a  $\frac{1}{2}$  deviation at 1000 yards was nothing anyone would complain about. Larry said they would meet at 1200 tomorrow to write the report, and they would be finished.

Steve and Ron returned to their barracks, and Ron skipped morning PT for once. He was up around 0900, and hoped they were still serving breakfast. He lucked out, and sat down to eat breakfast when General Shepard walked in. The most senior Noncom present bellowed "Attention on Deck" and everyone including Ron stood at attention. General Shepard walked right over to Ron, and said "At ease". Ron remembered to stand at parade rest, one does not sit with a 3-star general standing in front of them. "Mr. Williams, I spoke to Colonel Fellows, Well Done." He extended his hand, and Ron shook it. "Thank you General - I had fun."

The General sat down in front of Ron, "Son, you are doing your country a great service. The new developments to the Barretts rifles will save soldier's lives. I'm told you were personally responsible for suggesting the re-design of the scope mount, and helped Gunny resolve the flyer problem."

"Yes Sir, but I had a lot of help."

"Ron, I talked to your Senator and the Commandant of the Academy. Son, you are going to the Academy as soon as you reach the minimum age for enlistment and enrollment. I'm assuming you'd like to continue shooting even if you become an F-15 Strike fighter pilot?"

"Yes General, I love to shoot even more than I love to fly, thanks for arranging permission for

me to shoot the Barrett at Elmendorf's 1,000 yard range."

"I hear the Gunny is going out of his tree, because the weapon is still classified and he can't tell the rest of the Gunnies about the group he shot. Then I understand you served as shooting coach not only for the Gunny but another civilian whose only shooting experience was shooting caribou with a 7mm Magnum at 300-400 yards, and his first group was 12 inches at the 1,000 yard line."

"Yes General."

"Son, did you realize you might be more useful to the Air Force as a shooting instructor?"

"No General, I never considered that."

"Ron, they are going to be phasing out the attack aircraft, especially if that SOB Kerry gets elected. Your career as a pilot might be very short indeed. Just make sure you keep your options open."

"Thank you General, I'll keep that in mind."

Ron was wondering what all this was about, 3 star Generals don't usually chew the fat with Civilians. Maybe someone put a bug in his ear about his coaching skills. As the General stood up to leave, Ron stood as well, at attention. Ron felt like saluting, even though it would be a violation of protocol, so he just stood there ramrod straight until the General nodded and smiled, then turned to leave, when an aide whispered something to him. The General turned around, walked back over to Ron and spoke quietly "Ron, you might be expecting a very heavy package from Barretts sometime soon, I understand you've shot up all your match ammo in practice."

"Yes, General, that's what the note I got told me to do."

"Good for you Ron, see you later."

With that the general turned and marched out of the building. Ron's food was ice cold, so he dumped it and went back for some more. Just as he finished eating he heard "Attention on Deck" so he stood at attention again, but it was just Steve coming for him. As soon as Steve sat down, Ron sat down as well. "I heard the General was really impressed with you. He told me you were definitely going to the Air Force Academy. I'm really glad for you Ron, and I know you'll do well. Just be ready for a really rough first year."

"What do you mean Steve?"

"You're entire first year at the Academy, you're a Plebe, and the Upperclassmen will

continuously harass you to weed out the people who don't really belong. It's all a bunch of BS, and you'll get through it. You're in excellent shape, squared away, and academically I doubt if you'll finish out of the top 5%. Just remember your goals, and you'll get through it."

"Steve, the General was just dropping the hint that I might better serve the Air Force as a Shooting Instructor. If I Remember Correctly, the Air Force prefers shooting from 5-10 thousand feet, and usually 25mm rounds."

"He does have a valid point, it looks like Kerry will be the next president, and if he is, the Military will be a shadow of it's former self, and the first thing that goes will be any "Attack" squadrons, since attacking your enemy isn't politically correct."

"Steve, it seems to me the solution isn't to get rid of the military, but to get rid of the corrupt politicians."

"Ron, you hit the nail on the head, but don't repeat that to anyone else."

"How come?"

"Views like that can get you dismissed from the military, since the Admirals and Generals are more worried about their retirement benefits or next promotion than their men."

Ron realized he might have made a mistake choosing the military for a career, but it was too late to back out now. They got up and walked to Steve's Hummer. The next thing Ron knew, they arrived at the range. Gunny and Larry were already there, and as soon as they got seated, they started writing the report. They were finished an hour later, so Steve called VIP transport, and they said they'd be ready to fly in 30-45 minutes. Steve drove Ron back to BOQ to pick up his gear. The rest of the trip was strangely silent. Ron didn't talk because he was afraid he would blurt out what he was thinking, and Steve was thinking about a Personnel problem. When they arrived, Ron was checked through, and Steve gave him a hug, and told him to take care, and he would see him later. Ron quickly boarded the plane, and sat in the passenger section again, he had some thinking to do.

## Chapter 94 - Business as Usual

After a couple of days, Ron had forgotten all about what Steve had said, and was busy flying deliveries, since the Homesteaders wanted to get all their supplies in before winter, since you could get snowed in for weeks on end in some parts of Alaska. When he finally got a chance, Ron went Caribou hunting. He took his .308, since 400 yards was a chip shot for the Barrett, and most of the caribou he killed were between 200 and 300 yards. Besides the Barrett weighed a ton. Roy and Anne didn't want to come along, so Ron hitched the cart to the ATV, and drove out to the caribou hunting grounds. He stopped a mile away on the far side of the ridge like he did last year, grabbed the gun and his tarp, and hiked over the hill. As soon as he crested the hill he knew the caribou were still there because he could smell them. He made it 2/3 down the other side when he found an excellent shooting position. He laid down his tarp, loaded the rifle, then laid down in a military prone position. He used his rifle scope to glass the caribou where were standing there munching away. He selected 2 large males that were close together, released the safety, and quietly cycled the bolt. The crosshairs settled on the neck/shoulder region of the first male, and the gun went off, then he quickly cycled the bolt and shot the second male.

He got up, unloaded the rifle and hiked back to the ATV. The noise of the ATV coming over the ridge spooked the herd, and he drove right up to the 2 downed caribou. He made short work of skinning and gutting the animals, and then brain tanned each hide, and washed his hands. Anne said they needed more sausage, so butchering the animals took a little longer, but he still had several hours of daylight left, so he set out for home. It took part of the first hour just climbing over the ridge, but from there it was fairly flat, and since Lucky wasn't with him, he sped up to 20 miles per hour, which was as fast as he dared go with a full trailer. He might not have made it if it weren't for his headlight, since the last mile all he could see ahead of him was what the headlight lit. When he got home, it was too late to process the meat, so he backed the trailer into the smokehouse and closed the door, then parked the ATV in the shed next to the snow blower. Anne said he missed dinner, but she saved some food for him. Ron thanked his mom for saving dinner, and apologized he was so late. It took longer than he thought to skin gut and quarter 2 caribou. Roy nodded understandingly. He could remember trying to skin, gut and quarter 2 caribou by himself almost 20 years ago. "Was it that long ago?" Roy thought, "Let's see, Ron's almost 16, We were married almost a year before he was born, and it was 2 years before we were married - yup almost 20 years ago." Ron washed up, said grace, and ate dinner. After he read his Bible for a while, he went to bed.

The next morning, Bill called saying there was a huge package addressed to Ron waiting in Anchorage from Barrett. Ron said he knew about it, and asked if Bill had any other packages to be delivered. Anne said she could use a case of lids and rings for her canning jars. Bill said that he had a case in stock in Allakaket. Bill asked Ron if he were going to Anchorage anyway if he'd mind picking up some stuff for delivery to Allakaket. Ron said he would do it today. He turned to his mom, who said she needed the lids to can the caribou, so he might as well go



now. Ron told Bill he'd be in the air in half an hour, so tell the driver he'd meet him in 2 hours. Bill thanked Ron and said the lids and rings would be waiting for him in Allakaket. Ron grabbed his stuff, kissed his mom, and was out the door. As soon as he got the door open, he started the engine, and as soon as it warmed up, taxied out to the lake and took off.

He landed in Anchorage right on time, taxied up to the delivery truck, who backed his gate as close to the plane as possible. The driver complained the whole 2 minutes it took to load the 1 heavy box and the 10 lighter ones that he'd need a truss after this trip. Ron was glad the wheeled cart was almost the same height as the plane's door. He secured the crate as best as possible, then taxied toward the fuel pumps and topped off. Once he filled the tanks, Ron did a quick walk-around and climbed into the cockpit and started the engine. He programmed Allakaket into the GPS, and called the tower for clearance to take off. Once he got clearance, he turned onto the main runway and took off. He called Allakaket when he was 20 minutes out, and Bill said he would meet him at the runway. Ron landed on the lake, and taxied to the main runway. Bill was waiting for him with the case of lids and rings. He told Ron that the case was no charge since he dropped the packages off at Allakaket. Ron topped off his tanks, and flew home. He called his dad 20 minutes out, and the hangar door was open when he taxied up. Ron handed Roy the lids and rings, and walked around to get the cart, and wheeled the cart over to the plane. Roy heard grunting and groaning, then Ron came out of the hangar pushing the very heavy cart. He wondered what Barrett had packed in the box that weighed so much. He got it to the porch, but try as he might, he couldn't get it onto the porch, and finally he just opened the box with the blade of the <skip>. Inside were 6 ammo boxes full of Lake City .50 BMG Match ammo with the same lot number stamped on the boxes as his previous ammo. Next to it was a smaller Pelican case and a note was taped to it.

Ron:

Thanks for the outstanding evaluation. Our engineers were scratching their heads over the change in Point of Aim until they realized the QD dogs (the moving part) were all on the left side of the scope. We alternated left and right dogs on this new mount, and it should solve the problem. I sent you 6 cases of ammo so you can test the new scope mount. Enclosed is a new night scope with the new mount, and a check for \$20,000 dollars, since this is technically a new evaluation. General Shepard told us it was OK for you to conduct the tests at Elmendorf AFB instead of flying all the way back to Florida. Please e-mail me the results as soon as you can.

By the way, the scope is yours to keep.

Sincerely,

Ronnie Barrett

Ron thought he was dreaming. Seeing the look on his son's face, Roy read the note. He walked away shaking his head. Ron definitely led a charmed life. Ron put the ammo cases up

individually, since they were much easier to move by themselves, then carried the scope inside the house like he was carrying the Crown Jewels. Ron told his parents he needed to fly to Anchorage tomorrow, and asked them if they wanted to come along for the ride. He'd have to stay overnight, since he had to test the scope after dark. Anne thought she could get the canning done today, and didn't have anything else to do, so they said yes. Ron sent an e-mail to the CO of Elmendorf requesting permission to use the range tomorrow night, and to ask the Gunny if he could be there at 1600 tomorrow night. His carbon copy to the gunny came back immediately with a "heck yeah."

10 minutes later, he received an E-mail from the CO authorizing him to get on base with a cased rifle and military ammo. He said that he'd leave instructions with the guards that the contents of the cases were to be considered Top Secret, and they were not authorized to open, inspect or otherwise delay him. Ron sent a reply asking if he could land directly at Elmendorf, offload the military equipment at the Armory next to the range, then meet the Gunny later that night. The CO's reply agreed that would be best, he didn't want Anchorage's Finest to open the case and have a coronary. Ron made sure he had his FAA ID in his wallet, and printed 2 copies of the letter, and attached one of them to the Night Vision case. Roy and Anne spent the rest of the day canning caribou meat, and making sausage out of the rest. Ron caught up on his sleep, tomorrow would be a long day.

Ron slept in the next morning, and wasn't up until 0800. Roy and Anne were in no hurry to get up either, so it worked out well. When he finally got up, Lucky was standing next to the door like he was saying "I need to go NOW." Ron got to the door as quickly as possible, and Lucky was out the door like a scared cat. He made a beeline for the nearest tree, and spent the next couple of minutes thoroughly watering it. Lucky trotted back inside with a grin on his face like "What a relief." Anne had made a shopping list, so Ron and Roy decided to see if there was anything in the Sporting goods store they had missed in the last 3 trips. Ron would repeat his last trip, except this time he would drop the rifle, ammunition, and scope off at the base armory, then fly to Anchorage and park overnight, since Roy and Anne didn't have military ID on them.

Around 10:00, they packed into the DeHaviland and took off. 2 hours later, they received permission to land at Elmendorf. When Ron reached his assigned spot, 2 Hummers were waiting for him. 1 was Gunny's, and the other was Air Force Police. He guessed someone was taking the CO's orders seriously, and decided to give Gunny an escort. Gunny transferred the cases to his Hummer, and followed the flashing lights of the AF police Hummer to the Armory, where he locked them in the vault. Ron taxied back to the runway, and received permission to transfer to Anchorage. 20 minutes later, they were on the ground. They walked through the commercial terminal, and took a cab to the Inn. After they checked in and stored their bags, they took separate cabs. Ann wanted to go shopping at the local case lots store, while Ron and Roy were going to drool over the toys at the sporting goods store. When they got to the Sporting Goods Store, Dave and Larry welcomed them like long lost relatives. Ron thought "I guess if you drop \$5 grand at a store in one month, it tends to really improve the Customer Service." They spent the next couple of hours strolling through the store. Ron spotted some

interesting gadgets, and had Dave hold them for him at the counter until they were ready. He bought a Sure Fire Aviator light with the Blue LED, since the red LED didn't show blood very well, and a box of the batteries for it. He was bummed when Dave explained the battery the Aviator took was only available in non-rechargeable lithium, but someone was working on a rechargeable that would work. Roy saw how bright the light was, and liked it, so Ron bought one for Roy and Anne as well, then decided he should have one in each kit, and did a quick count and asked Dave what the price would be if he bought 8 of them. Dave said he'd give them an additional 10% off the marked price before the 20% discount, for the lights and batteries. Ron bought an extra case of batteries, it wasn't like he could go to the 7-11 down the street and buy spares. Dave made sure the cases of batteries were the freshest in stock, and even went in the back room and checked to see if there were fresher batteries, and came back with 2 cases that were just delivered last week. He explained the batteries lasted a long time in these lights unless you used the Xenon bulb a lot. Ron thought about it, and bought 8 spare xenon bulbs.

He spotted some multitools, and realized Anne's kit didn't have one. They had a good price on the Gerber 800 Multitool that Ron had in his kit, and he added it to the growing pile. Roy bought several boxes of Pyrodex pellets, a case of Sabots and Corbon .45 acp JHP bullets for the sabots, and several boxes of patches in cleaning solution, and a case of #209 shotgun primers. Roy might never use that many in his lifetime, but wanted to make sure Ron had enough in case he couldn't buy them later. With that thought he doubled his order. It's a good thing they were flying in a private plane, because that quantity of primers and powder required a HAZMAT label and extra shipping to ship anywhere. Ron spotted a cool Spyderco knife with a patient-safe serrated blade that clipped into his shirt pocket. It was called the Rescue Jr. and the Florescent Orange handle would make it easy to find in an emergency. He drooled over the Mel Pardue auto-opener next to it, but didn't think it was worth \$300.00, besides, the auto opener just made something to go wrong. He saw the Benchmade display, and was drooling over the AFCK 806, with the axis lock. When he noticed it was made of D2, he was sold. Ron told Dave to add it to the pile. Ron walked over to the gun rack and bought 4 more 20 round magazines for his SU-16 and a case of 55gr soft point ammo. If he was going to keep his "poodle shooter" he might as well get enough ammo for it. He now had a case of 55.gr fmj, a case of 55 gr. Soft points, and 500 55gr. JHP rounds.

Since it was starting to get cold, the store was having a sale on winter gear, and at the rate he was growing, Ron needed a new parka. Dave recommended a new "high tech" parka that was a third of the weight and bulk of the old styles, and completely water and wind proof. He bought several pairs of polypro longjohns, and a new snowmobile suit, even though he didn't own a snowmobile, the bib overall design was perfect over a pair of polypro longjohns for Alaskan winters. They had a pair of "moon boots" that looked cool, and were easy on/off, and marked down under \$100. He bought 10 pairs of knee-high polypro socks, and 10 pairs of wool extra-thick hiking socks that came up just below the knee like the moon boots. He bought 2 pairs of gloves, liners, and mittens as well. They had a heavy duty duffle bag made out of orange ballistic nylon that the entire kit fit into with room to spare. Dave realized Ron was a pilot, and

figured out that Ron was putting a winter survival kit together, and made several suggestions. He asked Ron how old his sleeping bag was, and Ron told him it was his Mom's and it was at least 10 years old. Dave walked over to the tents and sleeping bags, and showed him a mummy bag and a Tyvek Bivy sack. He told Ron the mummy bag was rated to -50F by itself, and -100F with the Bivy sack. Best of all, they both compressed down to the size of softballs, and only weighed a pound or two each. Ron took one of each. Ron looked at his watch, and realized he had to get back to the hotel and get some sleep, so he told Dave to ring up the order, and Ron handed him his AMEX card. Ron almost choked when he saw the total, then realized he had a couple of million in the bank, and signed the receipt. Dave called a cab for them, and helped the cabbie put all of their stuff in the trunk. When they got to the hotel, they had a bellboy haul their loot into the room, and Ron laid down for a nap, setting an alarm for 1700, giving him an hour to get to the Air Force Base.

Two things happened at 1700, Anne came in telling Roy how much food she bought, and how cheap it was, and Ron's alarm went off. He got dressed quickly, kissed his mom and dad, and hurried to the lobby. 5 minutes later, a cab pulled up, and delivered him to the Air Force Base. Since the cab couldn't enter, he dropped Ron off, who walked up to the guard shack, and presented his ID, asking them to call Gunny Mathews and tell him Ron Williams was at the gate, and needed transportation to the range. 10 minutes later, Gunny Mathews showed up with his Hummer, and drove Ron to the range. Gunny was cracking up about something, so Ron asked what was so funny.

"You should have seen the looks on people's faces when a 16 year old kid comes on base for a top-secret project."

"Gunny, I doubt this is classified anything more than Confidential - I don't have a clearance."

"Wanna Bet? Once you started this T&E project, Colonel Fellows vetted you for a Secret Clearance, since you can't get anywhere on base at MacDill without at least a Secret, and some areas require a Top Secret."

"Just call me James Bond."

If the Gunny hadn't been driving, he would have fallen off his seat laughing. When they got to the range, it was deserted, except 1 runner sworn to secrecy. Gunny had threatened to assign him to KP for the rest of his military career if he said one word to anyone. There were already 3 targets set up at the 1,000 yard range, and Gunny handed Ron a pair of red-lensed goggles. Ron put them on to let his eyes adjust, and Gunny took everything out, set the night scope onto the rifle, and boresighted it, then he started loading mags. When he had finished, and turned off all white lights, he told Ron it was OK to take off the goggles. He handed Ron a red-lensed flashlight to use from here on out if he needed to see anything. Ron set the rifle up, and when he was ready to go, Gunny told him to put the goggles back on and close his eyes, because he was about to fire a red flare to warn anyone they couldn't see that they were about to commence

firing. Ron heard the shot and the lighting of the flare. 1 minute later, Gunny told him it was OK to open his eyes and take off the goggles.

Gunny set up his spotting scope, and Ron got set behind the gun, then he pushed the PTT and asked Gunny if it was ok to commence fire. Gunny said Go Ahead, and Ron fiddled with the scope for a minute to optimize contrast, magnification and focus for the conditions. When he got everything all set, he was amazed that he could see the 1,000 yard target like it was sitting 10 feet in front of him. Ron cleared the safety, and when he confirmed his sight picture, he touched the trigger, and Gunny's voice came over the headphones. "Bullseye, and I believe x-ring, looks like that practice has been paying off Ron." Ron fired 4 more rounds, then Gunny sent the runner to retrieve the target and put up a fresh one. Gunny measured the group, and almost fainted. Ron had shot a 7" group at 1,000 yards. As soon as the range was clear, Gunny told Ron to shoot another group to confirm, then proceed with the testing procedure of shooting 5 shots, taking the scope off and re-attaching it, shooting 5 more until he had shot 50 rounds. This was going to be a long night.

After the 3<sup>rd</sup> group, Ron was convinced the fix for the mount worked. He could remove and re-attach the scope without changing the point of aim more than 1/4", and there was no pattern to the groups this time. Finally Ron asked Gunny if he wanted to try it. Gunny practically flew over to the Barretts rifle. Ron wasn't sure if Gunny's feet had touched the ground in the intervening 50 feet. Ron coached Gunny through setting up and getting into an ideal body position to shoot. Gunny was amazed how visible the target was, it was like someone was shining a spotlight on the target. He realized that between the huge 120mm objective lens, and the 4<sup>th</sup> generation electronics, the manufacturer was smart to install controls to manually limit the image intensification, and a safety override to protect the electronics in the event of a bright flash nearby that might overload the electronics and damage them. Ron had walked back to the spotting scope and donned Gunny's headset, while Gunny put on Ron's set. Gunny sighted the target, cleared the safety, and when the sight was directly below the x-ring, he touched the trigger. 3 seconds later, Ron was yelling that he hit the x-ring. Gunny had never scored an x-ring shot outside of 600 yards before. He settled down and fired the 4 remaining rounds in the magazine, then locked the action open with the safety on, and sent the runner down to collect the target. Gunny measured the target, and almost fainted when he realized he had shot a 9-inch group from an unfamiliar gun with a prototype Night Vision scope at 1,000 yards. He shook Ron's hand, then they retired to his office to write the report.

Their glowing report would make Ronnie Barrett very happy - the scope worked as advertised, with no bugs found. Gunny Mathews put in a short paragraph describing his shooting experience with the gun and new sight. It would later turn out that Gunny's report was what convinced the Pentagon to replace all their night vision scopes with the new Barretts prototype. Gunny was an experienced shooter, but had never shot a Night Vision equipped rifle before, and had never shot for score beyond 600 yards. They figured if "Gunny could do it", anyone could. When they finished, Gunny drove Ron back to the hotel in his personal Hummer since they had his rifle, scope and the remains of the case of LC .50 BMG Match ammo with them. Since he

was staying in his own room, they didn't have to worry about waking up Ron's parents, so Gunny came down to Ron's room carrying the rifle and the box of ammo. He sat down on the seat, and they talked for a while.

"Ron, I understand you're going to the Air Force Academy. I hope you're planning on shooting with our interservice team, they need the help."

"Gunny, I was planning on that, also I want to be a fighter pilot and fly the F-15 Strike Eagle."

"Ron, If Kerry becomes the next President, you might be better off on the shooting team. Rumor has it that Kerry plans on gutting the military to pay for more Socialist BS. And he plans on eliminating anything to do with offensive power first, so all the Attack and Fighter squadrons will go first. There are going to be a lot of pilots looking for jobs at United after he gets elected."

"Gunny, if things are so bad, why are you still in?"

"Good question, I've got 5 years left until I can retire after 20 years. I'll move down to Alabama where I'm from and live like a king on my retirement and savings. Don't get me wrong, the military is a good life, and you're doing something worthwhile. It's just whenever the Democrats get in charge they screw everything up, then if we don't get in a war, it takes 10-20 years of Republican administrations to get things back to where they belong, and then the democrats just screw it up again. I know you're too young, but during the Reagan Administration, the military was at its height, by the time Carter got in there - it slid downhill, and Clinton finished the job. George I and II tried, but Congress was controlled by Democrats who would rather pay every crack-addict whore to have 5 kids on Welfare than pay the military a decent living wage. You know that during Bosnia and DS 1, more military families were on food stamps than any other time in the history of the US?"

"Gunny, why do the people let them get away with it?"

"Ron, I know you've led a sheltered life, but stuff has been happening behind the scenes since the Kennedy Assassination that the Major Media either covers up or ignores, because it doesn't fit into their world view. There are two kinds of very rich people in this world that control most of everything. The Rich Conservatives by and large are the people who earned their wealth through hard work and shrewd investments. The Rich Liberals or Socialists are the descendants of the Rich Conservatives who did nothing to earn their wealth, and loathe their wealth for the guilt it gives them, but not enough to stop the trust fund checks. They go to all the right colleges, and meet all the right people, who believe the same things they do, that if everyone was equal, we'd all be better off. Except George Orwell said in "Animal Farm", "Of Course, some are more equal than others." and they want to set themselves up as the rulers of the world. The owners of the Major Media, and most of their employees, and all their major reporters share the world view of the second bunch - the Rich Socialists. If they were Poor Socialists, they'd

have no influence, but they have no problems turning the rest of us into Poor Socialists with them in charge. It's their basic arrogance that they really believe that they should be in charge that gets me. Luckily I won't live to see the final downfall of the United States. We're already sliding down that slippery slope, and unless something drastic happens, we'll be another 3<sup>rd</sup> World Socialist country in the next 20-30 years."

"Wow, I never knew that - what can we do?"

"The best you can do is get yourself in a position to either resist, evade, or join the New World Order. Some have already joined, some are planning on resisting, and people like us are best situated to evade. There's millions of miles of Alaskan Wilderness where a man can hide, live and never be found. One thing I would do between now and when Kerry get elected is buy as many rifles, ammunition and supplies as you'll need to either resist or evade them."

"Thanks Gunny, I hope you're wrong, but I plan on preparing just in case."

"Exactly Ron, Pray for the best, plan for the worst."

"You're a Christian?"

"Been one all my life, that's also why I'm planning on evading, just in case the Book of Revelation is about to come to pass. If it is, Christians, Orthodox Jews and devout Muslims world wide will be the targets of the One World Government."

"Why? We've never done anything to the Government?"

"If the One World Government turns out to be the one predicted by the Book of Revelation, it will be run by Satan, and the only people who won't worship him will be Christians, Orthodox Jews, and devout Muslims. That will immediately make them targets."

"Thanks for the advice Gunny. I've got to get to bed, I need to fly my parents to Allakaket tomorrow."

Gunny gave Ron a "guy hug" then stood back and saluted him. Ron returned it since no one else was there. Gunny turned and walked out of the room without a word. Ron fell asleep reading the Book of Revelation. What he read scared him half to death. If Gunny was right, things could go from bad to worse real fast. He decided to talk to his Dad tomorrow, and went to sleep.

Anne and Roy were up early the next morning, and ate breakfast, then they decided to read for a while, guessing that Ron didn't get to sleep until after midnight. A very tired looking Ron showed up around 10:00, ate a couple of cinnamon rolls and several cups of coffee to finish waking up. Lucky was glad he stayed in Anne and Roy's room last night, or he might have had

an accident. The taxi driver, and his brother with the truck showed up around 11:00, and between them and both bellboys, got both vehicles loaded. Roy gave each of the bellboys \$10.00, and when they got to the airport and got the plane loaded, paid the fare plus a \$5 tip, and gave the truck driver \$20. Ron's back hurt just from looking at the pile of canned goods and other groceries he'd have to unpack.



## Chapter 95 - Revelations

They were home 4 hours after they left, with a stop in Allakaket to fill up and stretch, and Ron used the cart to unload the plane. Later that afternoon, Ron and Roy sat down on the porch. “Something troubling you son?”

“Last night I had a very interesting talk with the Gunny. He’s convinced that the Wrath of God is right around the corner.”

Roy started to laugh, then told Ron “People have been forecasting the end of the world ever since Christ left the world almost 2,000 years ago. Christians were SURE they were in the “end times” during the persecution of the Emperor Nero in like AD 125. It turned out Nero was just another power-mad evil man bent on world domination, and persecuted the Christians for 2 reasons: 1) They refused to worship him, and 2) He needed a scapegoat for Rome’s failing economy. Rome was in the middle of its long decline, just like the US is now. That doesn’t mean we’re in the Final Tribulation. I’ll tell you a flare-lit tip-off. If a meteor ever hits the planet, and destroys over half the population, be on the lookout for the rest of the Biblical plagues. Until then, try and live your life as best as you can.”

“Thanks Dad, I was afraid Gunny was right, and in that case, the last place I’d want to be is in the Air Force. What about Kerry becoming president and ruining the military?”

“Son, there is a lot of time between now and November 2004, and GW has a few tricks up his sleeve. I’d be seriously surprised if he weren’t re-elected. One thing we should do is buy all the pistols and rifles we want between September and January.”

“Why’s that Dad?”

“The Assault Weapons Ban is due to sunset, and there’s a 90-day window of opportunity for civilians to purchase high-capacity magazines for their pistols, and certain rifles the Congress decided to ban because they looked military. Naturally it had no effect on crime, but it was a test by the gun banners in Congress to see how much the American People would tolerate. They found out the people had become a bunch of sheep. That’s why you hear survival/preparedness types referring to the average American as Sheeple.”

“I get it dad - Baaaaaa. OK, is there anything we should buy?”

“Only if you want a high-capacity pistol with relatively inexpensive magazines. Remember that P-14 that Steve had? Magazines cost over \$60 each for it right now, but come September, they could be as cheap as \$20 each.”

“Dad, I fired Steve’s P-14 Limited, I think it was very accurate for a pistol. I can afford to buy several of them and bunch of mags, and several cases of ammo if you want.”

“Ron, I wouldn’t worry about buying me one, I intend on dying here, I’m really getting old, and starting to feel my age. Anne on the other hand could live another 30 years easily. I’ll buy 2 of them, 1 for each of you, and a dozen magazines, and 2 cases of Cor-Bon 200 gr. “Flying Ashcan” JHP ammo. I’d store them somewhere, since you won’t need them up here, in case you need it later.”

“Dad, could you buy an extra one, and another dozen mags. If I’m a fighter pilot, they have some leeway with purchasing their personal defense weapon, and I’d love a P-14 in a cross-draw shoulder holster as a personal defense weapon.”

“Sounds like a good idea son, and we can easily afford another one. Let’s check the magazine prices the next time we’re in Anchorage, or maybe I’ll send an e-mail to my gunsmith in Washington and see what his prices are. He’s done well by us over the years, and if the magazine prices are coming down, he wouldn’t charge us more than he should.”

They walked inside, and Ron logged onto the internet, found Roy’s gunsmith’s webpage, then got his e-mail address. Roy typed a brief message, and the next day, he received a reply with a quote for 3 Para-Ordinance P-14 Limiteds in Stainless Steel, with 36 14-round magazines and 3 cases of Cor-bon 200gr JHP ammo, and 3 case of 230gr FMJ practice ammo. He included 3 cleaning kits, and a spare set of springs and firing pins for each weapon. He quoted them 10% over his cost on the P-14’s, \$15 each for the 14-round Para Ord mags, and cost for the ammo. Roy knew he couldn’t beat that price, and asked him how he would ship it. 10 minutes later he explained the ATF was cracking down on interstate shipment of weapons, so he needed an FFL in Alaska to ship to. Roy found Larry’s card at the Sporting Goods store, and sent him an e-mail asking him what he would charge to do an FFL transfer. Larry recognized Roy’s name, and decided to waive the fees, since he would probably get more business out of them later. Roy replied to his dealer’s e-mail with the address of Larry’s store, his FFL number, and an e-mail address and phone number in case he needed it.

Several days later, Roy received an e-mail that the guns were in and ready for pick-up. Anne decided to stay home, so Roy and Ron flew to Anchorage and back. Larry talked them into purchasing holsters and accessories while they were there, including a DeSantis style cross-draw shoulder holster with Kydex holster and an off-side dual-mag carrier for Ron, and 3 Blade-tech Kydex IWB holsters, and 3 BT dual-mag carriers. Ron purchased a clip-on Surefire light attachment that fit a rail machined into the front of the receiver with a rear-cap momentary button. It took the same battery as his Aviator, so he was set for batteries. He hoped he never needed it, but saw the usefulness in case he ever did. Roy signed the paperwork and handed Larry his credit card, and 15 minutes they were out the door and headed home. Since Anne didn’t want to shoot her gun, he took one of his empty 50 cal steel ammo cans, wiped all the metal surfaces of the gun and the magazines with a fine coating of gun oil, wrapped them in clean rags, and packed as many boxes of Cor-Bon JHP ammo that would comfortably fit with the gun, 12 mags, the IWB holster and dual-mag carrier, the cleaning kit, spare parts kit, and a handful of desiccant pouches. He wiped the seals with a silicon wipe to make sure they would

seal tight, and closed the lid tightly. He put a Capital P on the lid using a red permanent marker so he would know what was in there, but no one else would know. Ron test-fired his gun, cleaned it thoroughly, and packed it the same way he had packed Anne's. The remaining ammo fit into a 50-cal ammo can with room to spare. Thinking quickly, he added an "A" after the P on Anne's case, and marked his with a "PR" since he had a shoulder holster as well as the IWB holster. Since there was no restriction on the Springfield National Match rifle, he was in no hurry to buy one, besides, he was pretty sure GW would get re-elected.

Ron and Roy went fishing for the last time that season, and spent the afternoon talking and fishing. Anne made Caribou Stew for dinner. Since Lucky was getting older, he spent more time with Roy and Anne than Ron, since they sat down more and had more time to pet him. He didn't knock Ron over anymore, since he was starting to get arthritic and it hurt to stand on his hind legs. He still tried to lick Ron every time he came home, but Ron had to crouch down so Lucky could reach him. Ron's bicycle and skiing trips were solo trips now, since Lucky couldn't keep up. Ron flew a couple more delivery flights before winter set in, then as the lake froze solid, he swapped the pontoons for skis, and waited for the snow to start. He took the pumps out and stored them after having filled every water container in the house. He stayed home more this winter, because he realized his parents could easily become snowbound without him if there was a bad storm and it drifted against the front door. Still, he made a couple of overnight cross-country ski trips, but mostly skied his course in front of the cabin, and shot his rifle at his new official Biathlon targets. He had modified them so when the last target on the right was hit, the panel would reset. He passed the winter studying, skiing, and reading his Bible. Using Anne's study guides, he developed a more mature understanding of Revelation and other books of the Bible, and his faith grew. As the snow melted, Ron had a chronic case of cabin fever, since he couldn't ski in slush, but he really shouldn't switch the skis for pontoons until the lake melted all the way out. He slogged out to the lake several times, and called Bill. Allakaket Lake was clear, but his lake was still ice clogged. Finally they had a week of warm weather, and the ice melted, then flowed downstream, clearing the lake. That morning, Ron walked out to the hangar and replaced the skis with pontoons. He called Bill and said he was all set to fly again with his pontoons on.

Business slowly picked up until his 17<sup>th</sup> birthday on April 11<sup>th</sup>. His Mom and Dad made a big deal about it, and Lucky was too tired to howl. He got some neat presents, including a new faster more powerful laptop computer, since his computer was almost 10 years old by now, and basically obsolete. Roy bought some more solar panels and another Air-x wind turbine, and added 2 more batteries to their bank, and their "gadget desk" slowly filled up. He started flying to the lodges as they got ready for hunting season, then he was into hunting season, and again was flying 2 flights a day between Anchorage and Allakaket. One day he stopped in Anchorage to pick up some building materials for a delivery, and was about to take off when he saw a familiar face waving at him. It turned out to be Samantha. Ron guessed she was home from school for the summer. He got out of the plane and walked over to her. She gave him a big hug and said "Long time no see." then asked him for a ride home. By now she was a beautiful 19-year old woman, and there was no way Ron could say no. She packed her bags in the back of

the plane, and he noticed she was wearing the fanny pack he made for her family many years ago. When she was loaded up, he opened the front passenger door and helped her in. She was totally capable, but Ron was smitten by her beauty. Once she was seated and belted, he closed and locked the door, and walked around the aircraft to check the plane out, but also to get his pulse and breathing under control. Once he could talk coherently, he climbed aboard, started the engine, did a pre-flight, and called the tower for clearance. He entered the waypoint for Samantha's house in the GPS, and taxied to the runway. It took longer than usual to take off, he was heavily loaded with rebar and other building materials. Finally the air speed indicator told him he was flying fast enough, and he pulled the yoke back into his lap, and they were flying.

Halfway to Samantha's place, he noticed smoke coming from the engine compartment, right about the same time the fire warning horn started blaring. He reached down to pull the fire extinguisher handle that flooded the engine compartment with CO2 and fire retardant. By the time the fire was out, the engine sputtered and died. "Sam, we have to land now. Look out your window and see if there are any lakes or any clearings we can land in. They have to be ahead of us and close." Ron was looking out his window when Sam yelled "Lake 1 o'clock low about 2 miles."

"Sam, how big is it?"

"About the size of my lake, and the land's flat around it, just a treeline between us and the lake."

Ron turned the nose of the plane with the rudder only so he could see the lake. It would have to do. He looked at his instrument panel, and they were all dead except his GPS which was running on battery power, and his emergency altimeter, which was fairly inaccurate. The GPS said 1500 feet, and the altimeter said 2,000, so he went with the GPS. He knew the DeHaviland loaded like it was had the glide angle of a rock, but he did what he could to improve it. He had 1500 feet to lose inside 2 miles, so he pushed the nose over to gain airspeed, and increase his glide range. "Sam, you need to brace for impact, this is going to be rough. Take your glasses off, and put your face on a pillow or something soft and bend over with your hands protecting your head. I'm going to try and land on the lake. Wish me luck."

Ron ran out of airspeed and altitude right as he crossed the threshold of the lake. He dropped 20 feet to the water, coasted to the other side, and grounded on the opposite shore.

"Sam, get out now, the plane could catch fire - get at least 100 feet away."

Samantha turned grabbed her book bag, and broke her previous best attempt at the 100 yard dash. Ron grabbed the 2 bags closest to him and ran out of the plane. After 15 minutes, the plane didn't catch fire, so he told her to stay put and he'd check out the plane.

First they removed all the survival gear, including the medical kits, then they started unloading

anything remotely useful. Half an hour later, Ron opened the engine cowling, and what he saw made him want to cry. The engine was wrecked, and all the wiring was melted by the fire. He guessed that an oil line had let loose, spraying oil all over the hot engine. The resulting fire gutted the engine compartment before the fire extinguisher could put it out. He tried both his radios, and neither worked. He took his GPS unit out of the plane, and it still worked. Thinking fast, he took a pencil and small notebook out of his fanny pack, and copied their coordinates in case the batteries ran out on the GPS. He showed them to Samantha, as well as how to operate the GPS in case something should happen to him. He remembered his handy talkie, and pulled it out of his bag. The batteries were fully charged, so he switched the radio to the designated local 2 meter emergency frequency and started broadcasting “Mayday, Mayday, Mayday. This is Ron Williams. My plane is down and unflyable. My passenger and I are fine, but stranded.”

He released the PTT and didn’t hear anything. He decided that in order to save batteries, he would transmit once an hour for the next 12 hours starting in 3 hours when someone would realize they were missing, then once a day at 0900 until the batteries ran out.

“Sam, looks like we’re going to have to stay overnight, or maybe longer. We need to set up camp and find some food, since the contents of our fanny packs won’t last more than 3 days.”

“Ron, if I didn’t know any better, I’d think you did this on purpose, but I know you’d never wreck your plane, even to be alone with me.”

“Not likely Sam, you’re a nice girl, and a total babe, but I’m waiting until I’m married.”

“Why, sex is so much fun.”

“Sam, premarital sex is against God’s laws. He calls it Fornication. It’s not because God’s a Party Pooper, but he wants what’s best for us. Sex is designed for a husband and wife to share as something special only they can share. Every time you have sex with someone, you leave a piece of yourself behind. I’d rather wait to share it the first time with my wife.”

“OK, I guess that means we’ll have to find something else to do while we wait to be rescued.”

“Sam, I want to take that rebar and those tarps and build a big tent, it’s going to get cold tonight, and I just have my mummy bag and my Bivy sack.”

“Ron, I’ve got a Mylar bag in my kit, and that means you have 1 too.”

“OK, if I let you use the Mummy bag, and I use the 2 Mylar bags and the Bivy sack, I should be warm enough.”

“That’s awfully Chivalrous of you. We’d be a lot warmer in the same bag.

“Nice try Sam, even though we’d be much warmer, the temptation would be too great, and I’m sure we’d wind up having sex.”

“So what’s wrong with that.”

“Sam, you weren’t listening earlier, I wasn’t kidding.”

“Ok, ok, calm down, I won’t bring it up again.”

“Thanks Sam. Let’s get the tent set up.”

They got the tent set up, and moved all their supplies inside, then Ron made a fire ring on the down wind side, and started hauling wood. Sam decided that she would help, so Ron told her to only pick up the downed wood for now. Ron found an evergreen tree with fresh boughs, and he decided that if he chopped it down, the boughs would make lying on the ground much more comfortable. 15 minutes later the tree was down, and he was limbing it. He dragged the limbs over to the tent, and started making beds for them, then covered the boughs with another tarp to keep the sap off them. Ron started calling every hour on the hour, then realized that they were over 100 miles off course, because no one knew he had picked up Samantha, and her house was over 100 miles north of where he was delivering the construction supplies. He stopped transmitting, since he knew they wouldn’t be looking for him so far north. He decided to just transmit at 0900 each morning, or if a plane flew over. He took out his fishing kit, caught a couple of trout, and lit the fire and broiled the trout for dinner. They went to bed shortly after dark.

Around midnight, Ron was wakened by Samantha screaming at the top of her lungs. Thinking there was an emergency, Ron pulled his .44 and his flashlight, then said “Sam what’s wrong?”

“Ron. Is that you?”

He realized she was having a nightmare and quickly put the gun back up, and flipped the much softer LED lights on. “Sam are you OK?”

“No I’m not - That SOB raped Me.”

“Sam what are you talking about, I haven’t touched you.”

Sam rolled over to Ron wrapped her arms around his neck and started sobbing. The story came out in bits and pieces. She had joined a Sorority her freshman year, since it was the cheapest place to stay on campus. During Rush week, the pledges and sisters of her sorority were invited to a frat party. There were a bunch of kegs of beer and everyone seemed to have a good time. She had a few beers, but was OK until one of the senior frat members offered her another beer. Half an hour later, she was woozy and staggering, and he practically carried her upstairs to his

room. She didn't remember anything except waking up in her clothes, and feeling sore all over. The next day the senior sisters were telling her she was a real "Party Animal" and she was now a member of the sorority. Not realizing what had happened, she thought they were complimenting her. 2 weeks later, she started burning when she went to the bathroom, so she went to the school nurse. She diagnosed her with a STD. She didn't understand, she thought she was still a virgin. The nurse asked her bluntly if she had been to any frat parties in the last two weeks. When she said yes, the nurse just shook her head, since she knew what had happened.

Ron saw her far away stare, and realized that she couldn't remember, but she needed to know it wasn't her fault. "Sam, I've got something important to tell you. Part of my medical studies included drugs that included tranquilizers. You were probably given Ruphian in your drink, It's a powerful tranquilizer with some side effects including loss of short-term memory, and stupor."

"So what you're telling me is that SOB slipped me a Mickey, and when I was in a drug-induced stupor, he had sex with me."

"Basically, legally it's date rape and a felony. The important part you need to know is that you were a victim, not a willing participant, since you were practically unconscious."

"So I'm not a Slut?"

"Why would you think that?"

"My dad said I dressed like a slut, so I thought I was."

"Sam, no woman deserves to be treated like that, regardless of what they are wearing. I don't think you're a slut. I think you're a very nice girl, who led a sheltered life, made the mistake of going to a frat party, and was assaulted at that party."

"Oh God, I wish I'd never slept with all those guys at school."

"What do you mean Sam?"

"After the party, someone put out the word that I was a slut, and soon I was the most popular girl in school."

"Sam, I'm sorry, is there anything I can do?"

"Ron can you hold me?"

"Sure, I've always been your friend. I'll help you through this, but I'd highly suggest switching

schools next semester.”

“Where to, I don’t have the money or the ability to switch. There aren’t any other Nursing schools in Alaska.”

“You’re a nursing major - I might know someone who can help. I’ll have to get hold of him when we get out of here.”

Sam and Ron slept in each others arms the rest of the night. It was exactly what Sam needed, the closeness without the sexual demands.

Ron woke up at 0800 the next morning, and gently untangled himself from Samantha. He started the fire again, and got some water boiling for hot cocoa. When it was hot, he woke Sam up and gave her a cup. She sat up in her sleeping bag, and Ron was glad she wore her shirt to bed last night. She thanked him for the cup, then remembered what had happened last night, then remembered that Ron had held her all night without anything else. At 0900, he picked up his radio and transmitted without any contact. He shut the battery off, and stowed the radio in his bag. When she finished her cocoa, Samantha spent the rest of the morning talking to Ron. Slowly it dawned on her that Ron really did care about her, but wasn’t in love with her. In a way she was glad, since right now the last thing she wanted was a sexual relationship.

She told Ron she needed to use the bathroom, so Ron handed her a pack of Kleenex and told her to make it last, because that was all there was, and to make sure she checked her surroundings before she took off her pants, and to go at least 150 feet away from the lake. Ron handed her the .22, which made her feel better, and she trudged off into the woods. When she came back, Ron handed her a tube of Purell to wash her hands, then she rinsed them in the lake, but downstream from where Ron had used his Voyager to draw water from the lake to refill their canteens and his camelback. She handed him the .22 back and thanked him, then decided to give him a big hug, but not a kiss. “Ron, I forgot to thank you for being a friend instead of trying to sleep with me.”

“Sam, right now what you need is a friend. Later, you’ll find some guy and fall head over heels in love with him. Please try and wait for the right guy to come along.”

“How will I know he’s the right guy?”

“First of all, you’ll have a “love” reaction to him, and then you’ll find other things you like about him. The important difference is he won’t want to sleep with you right after he meets you. Guys who want to sleep with you before you’re married or at least engaged are only after 1 thing.”

“Thanks Ron, you really are a friend.”



“Sam, I always will be.”

That deserved a hug and a kiss on the cheek. Ron appreciated the gentle kiss on the cheek and the hug more than any of her previous attempts to strangle him and simultaneously give him a tonsillectomy with her tongue. They spent the rest of the day doing things to make it easier for someone to find them, including cutting open one of the orange trash bags and tying it to the wings of the plane with wire from the construction supplies. Ron made flags out of the other orange trash bag, drove rebar into the ground, and tied the plastic onto it at various strategic locations around their campsite. If they didn't see the orange plastic on the plane's wings, they might see the orange plastic flags flapping in the breeze, since the human eye is attracted to movement. To help pass the time, Ron spent part of each day teaching Sam about survival, and how to use the gear in her pack. She learned to start, feed and put a fire out, how to fish with the emergency fishing kit, and how to make stuff with the various materials around. He taught her how to use a map and compass, how to signal for help using the mirror and whistle. Ron transmitted every day at 0900, and after 2 weeks he was getting discouraged, and started considering the very risky proposition of hiking out, when on the 17<sup>th</sup> day, he heard a faint response to his calls, and repeated it. This time the response came in loud and clear. It was a radio operator aboard an EC-130, and he had a rough fix on their position. A couple of hours later, he could hear them much clearer, and when they were in his transmission range, they asked if he had his coordinates. He had his notebook out and read the UTM and Lat/Long coordinates of where they were. The operator said a Jolly Green would be there in a little over 2 hours. Ron ran to tell Samantha the good news. She grabbed him and gave him a deep kiss on the lips. Ron was glad they were getting rescued soon, because his will power was just about gone. Another week and he would have wound up having to marry her.

They spent the rest of the time breaking camp and getting ready to get evacuated. 2 hours later, Ron heard the distinctive roar of a helicopter, and signaled it with a signal mirror. Ron told Sam to get under the wing and shut her eyes, since the helicopter would kick up a lot of dust landing. As soon as the whirlybird landed, and the dust settled, Ron was amazed to see his Uncle Steve running toward him. Steve swept his nephew off his feet, “Thank God you're OK, they had almost called off the search when the EC-130 picked up your signal, and relayed the frequency and general bearing to the listening post just north of Anchorage. The listening post got a better location on you, and the EC-130 was up today flying a circle search over your suspected transmission site. When you transmitted this morning, the listening post gave them a better bearing and distance, and they flew right at you until they could hear your transmission. Once you gave them the coordinates, and they checked, they alerted the rescue team with the Jolly Green.”

Just then Samantha made an appearance, and Steve got a good look at her, and turned to Ron “Are you sure you want to get rescued?” Ron's pained look told Steve all he needed to know. He walked over to Samantha “Hi, you must be Samantha. You're parents are worried sick about you. Let's get you home young lady.” Ron and Samantha collected their personal gear, and 15 minutes later, they landed at Samantha's place. Once the reunion was over, Ron and

Steve reboarded the chopper, and Ron asked if they could sling lift his plane back to Allakaket or Anchorage. Steve asked the crew chief, who asked Ron how much the plane weighed, then turned to the pilot, who nodded his head. They flew back to the crash site, rigged the plane for transport as a sling load, and flew it back to Elmendorf. They put it in an unused hangar, and one of the private pilots from Allakaket that was working with the Air Force SAR mission flew Ron back to Allakaket. The doctor checked him out, and said it was ok for him to fly home tomorrow. When Ron flew the Cessna home, his mom and dad looked like they had aged 10 years each.

## Chapter 96 - High Friends in Low Places

Ron spent the next couple of days with his parents, reassuring them that everything was OK, that he'd come through the crash OK. Roy took Ron outside and asked him point blank if he'd had sex with Sam.

"Dad, you know me better than that - the last couple of days I was really tempted, but we were saved in the nick of time. Sam's been through a really rough experience as school, and the last thing she needed was a sexual relationship. Matter of fact, I need to get hold of Doc Richards to see if we can get her transferred to another nursing school."

"Why don't you sit down and tell me what happened to her."

Ron gave his dad the Reader's Digest version of what Sam told him had happened to her at the frat party and afterward. Roy was madder at her father than anyone else. "I can't believe that any father would treat his daughter like that - If he hadn't said what he did, her victimization would have ended at the frat party. Since he planted the idea in her head, she probably felt she deserved it, and went along with acting the part. I hope I never run into him, I might end up spending my final years in jail."

They went inside, and Ron sent an e-mail to Doc Richards. He gave Doc the same Reader's Digest version he gave his Dad, and several days later Doc sent a rocket back. He was livid, wanted to know which fraternity it was, etc. He wanted justice. He said he knew the deans of several good nursing schools on the East Coast, and a letter from him could get her transferred in a heartbeat. He'd even arrange a partial scholarship, supplemented by a work-study program at the local hospital, and a trust fund he'd establish for her to pay her living expenses. Ron felt he needed to talk to Sam, so he called her on the radio, and Steve answered. He put her on, and Ron said he had some good news, and needed to talk to her. She told him to hurry up and fly up there. Hearing the tone in her voice, he told his Mom and Dad something was wrong at Samantha's, and he needed to get up there right now. Roy knew it was serious when Ron checked his guns before walking out the door to the Cessna. He was at her place an hour later, and Sam ran out to him. "Ron, let's get the hell out of here, my Dad's gone nuts. He's calling me every name in the book, and he's hit my Mom twice."

Ron was all ready to rush in to the rescue, but realized that Steve was armed too, so he jumped into the plane, opened the passenger door, started the engine, revved it to max and was out of sight in seconds. As soon as he was airborne, he switched frequencies to the Emergency frequency, knowing that Steve couldn't monitor it, and requested an armed response to Steve's house, since Ron felt Steve's wife was in mortal danger. Bill came on the radio and said they had no Sheriff or posse for law enforcement. The nearest armed response was in Anchorage. Ron wished he had the DeHaviland, but he only had the Cessna, and that could only carry 4 people at a time, and 3 people couldn't overcome an armed man. Bill called the US Marshal's

office in Anchorage, and they said they could have an armed team there in a little over an hour. That was faster than Ron could safely land at Allakaket and return, so Bill told Ron to fly Sam to Allakaket, and he'd place her in protective custody until the Marshals sorted things out. Sam was worried about her mom, but was glad she made it out alive. Ron landed in Allakaket, and stayed with Bill and Sam until things got sorted out. Ron sent his Dad an e-mail, then radioed him to get him to check the e-mail account since he didn't want to say what he had to say over the air, especially since Steve might be listening. 3 hours later, the Marshal's Huey landed, with Steve in cuffs. Sam and Ron were deliberately kept away, and the senior marshal talked to Bill. What he heard made him fall to his knees and weep. When he regained his composure, Bill and the Marshal met with Ron and Sam.

Bill broke the bad news to Samantha. "I'm sorry Samantha, but you're Mom's dead. She was found bludgeoned to death, and your father was covered in her blood."

"Bill, he's NOT my father and I'll take a DNA test to prove it."

Bill and Ron looked at Samantha with shocked looks.

"My mom's dead already, so I can tell you the truth. She was dating my dad, but got knocked up by one of her cousins. She's from a small town in Tennessee, and it happens sometimes. She named Steve as my father, but I think he suspected. When I turned 14, he started making advances toward me, but I refused, and Mom stopped him. She kept him from doing something horrible with me, but he treated me like trash. Mom stayed married to him since she didn't know what else to do, and she was attracted to him, but he had a violent temper. I knew it was only a matter of time before he did something like this. I told my Mom what had happened at School, and he must have overheard, because he was yelling and screaming, calling me every name in the book, and threatening to kill me. When Ron called, Steve was distracted, and Mom grabbed the shotgun and held him at gunpoint until I could get out the door. I hope she got off at least 1 round before he killed her."

"Sam, your mom's body was found next to the shotgun, and it had discharged, but Steve didn't have a scratch on him, just her blood all over himself."

"Bill, if you'd let me take Ron's pistol, and give me a clean shot, I can save the state the cost of a trial."

"Samantha, he might be a monster, but you don't want his death on your conscience."

"Bill, trust me, my conscience wouldn't bother me in the least."

"Not right now, but what about later. Police have to deal with taking another life, even if justified, and they pay for it all their lives. Killing another human being takes something out of you."

Ron composed another e-mail to his dad, and called him again to have him check his e-mail.

10 minutes later, Roy called back and approved.

When he received his Dad's e-mail, Ron put his plan into action. He e-mailed Doc Richards gave him an update on the situation, and he replied that they would love to have Samantha stay there for the rest of the summer, and go to school nearby in the fall.

Ron showed Sam the reply to his e-mail, explained what he had been up to, and Sam squealed in delight, hugged the stuffing out of him, and laid a liplock on Ron that almost made him pass out from lack of oxygen, and this with Bill standing right there.

"Ron, you've saved my life 3 times in the last couple of weeks, and you've asked for nothing in return - I know I'll never forget you."

Ron had enough money in his account to buy Samantha a one-way ticket to North Carolina, where Doc Richards lived with his wife, so he had Bill call Alaska Airlines and arrange a flight tomorrow. The next one left at 3:00 tomorrow afternoon, so Ron asked Sam if she'd like to go shopping in Anchorage first, since she left with the clothes on her back, and he didn't want her to have to face that house again. Sam gave Ron another hug and a kiss. Ron said "Sam, if you don't stop that, I might never let you go, but that would be wrong."

"What do you mean Ron?"

"Sam, I'll always be your friend. At the same time, you're a beautiful woman, and I'm sexually attracted to you, but I don't have the feelings for you that a husband should. Besides, my destiny is different than yours. We might have fun for a while, but it wouldn't last."

"Ron, you're pretty smart for a 17-yr old. I don't love you either, but I'm so grateful that I could stay with you as long as you wanted."

"Thanks, Sam, I appreciate it, but we'd be together for all the wrong reasons. I'll fly you to Anchorage tomorrow, we'll go shopping, and I'll put you on the plane to North Carolina."

"Ok Ron, but be ready for the "goodbye kiss" of you lifetime."

"Maybe I better bring some oxygen with me."

They both had a good laugh at that. Ron took his overnight bag out of his plane, and Bill got some scrubs for Samantha to wear. He got them separate rooms on opposite sides of the inn just in case. They slept as well as possible, and were up at 0800 for breakfast. After breakfast, Ron said "Sam, we better go, it's two hours to Anchorage, and your flight leaves at 3:00 pm."

“Ron, that’s six hours from now.”

“Exactly. My Mom could never take less than 2 hours to shop.”

“Ron you’re such a man sometimes.”

“Guilty as charged - let’s get going.”

Sam wore her scrubs, since her clothes were dirty, and she’d rather make a clean start. She managed to keep her hands off Ron as they drove to the plane, and this time, she got in by her self just fine, thank you. Ron taxied forward to the pumps, topped off the tanks, then taxied toward the lake. After getting permission to take off, he turned upwind and was airborne seconds later. He turned toward Anchorage, and Sam asked him how he knew which way to turn.

“Sam, this thing on my dash is a GPS receiver. It triangulates the signals from geosynchronous satellites orbiting earth over 25,000 miles up. They are stationary relative to the earth, and they act as fixed transmitters for the receiver to triangulate signals from. It can locate us in 3-dimensional space with accuracy up to 3 feet. I knew the coordinates for Anchorage before we took off, and programmed it as a waypoint. I tell the receiver that I want to fly to that waypoint, and it tells me which way and how far. It even tells me how fast I’m going, and how long it will take to get there.”

“Ok Professor, I ask a simple question, and I get a doctoral dissertation.”

Ron looked at the GPS, and told Sam they’d be in Anchorage in an hour and a half. Instead of asking Ron again, she looked at the instrument. It was reading their speed in knots, and had a countdown for their ETA. She could barely see his airspeed indicator, and noticed his airspeed was faster than his ground speed. She thought that they were heading into a headwind. An hour and 15 minutes later, Ron called for landing clearance. They received clearance, and proceeded right in. Ron landed the plane, and since she had no baggage, and he was going to say goodbye to her, he left his shoulder holster, fanny pack, and knives in the plane, and locked it tight. Sam asked Ron if he clinked when he walked. He didn’t get the joke, so they kept walking. As soon as they were through the terminal, they found a cab. Sam asked the driver to take them to the mall, and 15 minutes later, they were at the main entrance to the mall. Sam looked like she had died and gone to heaven; Ron looked to see if there was a Sporting Goods store around, then realized he’d have to go with Sam, since he had to pay for everything. She stopped in a few boutiques to buy some highly fashionable clothes, then went to a department store to buy some “Girl Stuff” and things to put it in. After they checked out, Ron whispered “Sam, I don’t want to embarrass you, but you forgot to buy bras.”

“That’s because I don’t wear one.”

“No kidding, every time I hug you, I have to fight not to get aroused.”

“Nice to know I have that effect on you.”

“Quit kidding Sam, you might want to buy a few, Doc Richards is old, and you don’t want to give the old codger a heart attack.”

Sam had to agree with his logic, and they went back, and she bought a couple of sexy bras.

“That’s not exactly what I had in mind, but it’s a start.”

She got jeans, shorts, shirts, shoes, toiletries, socks, and Ron bought her a small bottle of perfume as a going away present. Right after they paid for it, she put some of it on, and Ron was looking around for a fountain to jump in to cool off. Finally she was done shopping, and stopped to pack her bags. Ron asked her if she wanted lunch, so she walked over to a Chinese fast food joint, and ordered for both of them. Ron liked the food, even if the tastes and smells were different than what he was used to. At 1:00, he said he had better get her to the airport just in case. She walked by a bookstore, and asked Ron if she could buy some books for the flight. Ron noticed she had 3 romance novels in her hand as they checked out, but didn’t say anything. Finally he got her out of the mall, and flagged a cab to the airport. They handed her tickets to the agent, who exchanged them for boarding passes, and Sam stuck her fanny pack in her checked luggage, then let them check it through. She kept a purse and a small carry-on with her. They cruised through Security, and Ron sat with her until her flight was called. They stood up, and Sam gave him the most passionate kiss she ever had, then turned and walked away without a word. Ron stood there with his mouth open, watching her sashay through the gate. If he’d have said anything at this point, he knew he’d regret it later, because what he was thinking was “Forget the Air Force. What a Woman.” As she walked out of sight, she turned and saw him standing there open-mouthed, waved and blew him a kiss. You could have knocked Ron over with a feather, and he stood there for about 5 minutes until her plane was pushed away from the gate. When he was finally able to think a conscious thought, he realized he was standing there like an idiot with his mouth open, staring into space. He knew one thing, she wasn’t kidding about that Goodbye Kiss.

He finally snapped out of it, and walked to a pay phone, and using a calling card, called the number Doc Richards had given him, and described Samantha. Doc said “Sounds like you let one get away.”

Ron, always the one for the bad pun said “You ain’t just whistling Dixie there Doc.”

“One more bad pun out of you young fellow, and I’m hanging up.”

“Sorry Doc, take care of Sam, she’s special.”

“Don’t worry, Bert’s already planning on mothering her.”

“Doc, what she really needs is a friend and a mentor, she just lost her mom because her father killed her. He would have killed Sam if her mom hadn’t held him at gunpoint so she could escape with me.”

“Ok Ron, we’ll take it from here. My Pastor is a really good therapist as well, and has worked with women with sexual abuse before.”

“Thanks for everything Doc, keep in touch.”

“See ya later Ron.”

After they hung up, Ron made the long lonely walk to his plane. He was praying for Samantha all the way, and hoped the rest of her life would turn out OK. When he got to his plane, he put his fanny pack and shoulder holster back on, then spotted a note on the passenger seat, with a lipstick kiss mark on it. He opened it and read:

Dear Ron:

I can’t tell you this in person, but I wish I had slept with you. You’ve been the nicest person in my life. I’m pretty sure I love you, but I can’t stand in the way of your dreams.

I hope you have a nice life, and keep in touch.

Love Always,

Sam

Ron broke down and cried. He realized he really did love Sam, but now she was gone. He had a plane to fly, so he got his emotions in check. Still he knew Sam would always be his first true love.



## Chapter 97 - A Homecoming (of sorts)

When Samantha arrived at the Charlotte North Carolina airport, she went to baggage claim, got her suitcases, then saw a liveried driver holding a placard that had said Samantha, but had been crossed over, and SAM written in its place. Samantha knew that the driver was for her, because only Ron called her Sam. She walked up to the driver “Hi, I’m Sam.”

The driver said, “This way young lady” and he walked away without another word. As he walked out the door, they were met by a couple in their mid-50s to early 60s. He was a kindly gentleman and said “Hi Sam, I’m Doc Richards and this is my wife Bert, it’s short for Bertrand, but she feels that’s too stuffy. If you’ll give Nelson your bags, we can talk in the car.”

Nelson the driver took her bags, and then opened the passenger door of the stretch Lincoln limousine. He offered his arm to Samantha, Bert, and then Doc. Bert and Sam sat in the back seat, and Doc took the jump seat riding backwards so he could talk to Samantha.

“First of all Sam, I go by Doc. I appreciate first names. Ron told me you prefer Sam, so I’ll call you Sam unless you’d rather have me call you Samantha.”

“Doc, please call me Sam, even if it was the name of Ron’s Wolf pup.”

“Ron had a wolf for a pet?”

“That’s what he told me. Evidently his dad Roy befriended a lone wolf when he was first stranded in Alaska, and he called him Oliver. Later Oliver met a wild wolf named Francine, and they had 2 litters. The second litter contained a runt, and Francine dropped him on Roy’s doorstep. They bottle fed him, and Ron wound up being his best buddy. Years later, Ron was surprised by a bear, and all he had on him was a .22 pistol, and Sam died saving him. Ron fired over 30 rounds into the bear, and the 28<sup>th</sup> round finally killed it.”

“No wonder Ron liked calling you Sam. He was really attached to that wolf.”

“Doc, Ron said you are a Neurosurgeon?”

“That’s right, I’m a senior professor of Neurosurgery, and I spend most of my time flying around the country consulting on the toughest cases.”

“Wow, I bet that took a lot of education.”

“The neat thing is I’m still learning. Also, it’s deepened my faith in God.”

“How’s that, I though all scientists are Atheists?”

“Nope, just the more vocal ones like Carl Saegan. The rest of us vary from Deists to Christians.”

“I don’t get it; the Big Bang Theory said we were an accident of Nature.”

“Yes my dear, but it’s just a theory, just like Evolution. But the schools teach it as though it were fact.”

“Obviously I missed something somewhere.”

“You lived in Alaska all your life; did you ever get to look at the stars at night? Or how about the Miracle of Birth. Or how about just plain Medical Miracles - I’ve witnessed hundreds in my career. People who should have died, and survived. They had no hope medically of living, then all of a sudden, their problem goes away, and they’re fine. It takes a sense of wonderful Awe to realize how great God is.”

“If God’s so great, why did all this rotten stuff happen to me?”

“It could have been worse; you could have AIDS, or be dead, or pregnant without a husband. I know for a fact Ron really cares for you. Sometimes bad things happen, but God puts good people like Ron in our path to help fix the damage, and lead us to him.”

“I know for a fact Ron’s good, I threw myself at him so many times that I swore he was Gay. Finally I realized he just loved me too much to use me like that.”

“Exactly Sam, Ron may not be “in love” with you, but he definitely loves you, and wants what’s best for you. He went through all the effort to contact me, get you on a plane, and get you here where you can start over. Right now, you have a rare opportunity miss; you have a completely blank slate. No one knows you, knows your past, or has any preconceived notions about you. I only know enough about you to try and help. When you feel up to it, I’d like you to meet with our pastor, he’s a trained counselor and therapist, and he specializes in some of the stuff that’s happened to you. He has some answers that will help make sense of all that’s happened to you, and help you get going on your new life. By the way, I phoned the dean of the University of North Carolina’s School of Medicine. You have been accepted for the fall semester, and all your units from University of Anchorage will be transferred. Bert and I are picking up the tab for your tuition, but you’ll be expected to work 20 hours a week in the University hospital to pay for your books and incidental expenses. I have an old Carman Ghia in the garage I haven’t driven in years. It’s yours to use while you’re here. There are a few house rules, and there are no exceptions. 1) No Smoking - Anything. 2) No Drinking 3) No Male visitors outside of the kitchen and parlor. No Male visitors after 10:00 without special permission from Bert or I. If you need to have a man with you at the computer when you are studying, the door will be open at all times. 4) These rules are not negotiable.

“Doc, what is this - prison?”

“No dear lady, these rules are for your protection. Drinking got you in trouble before. Keeping men out of dangerous areas like your room will minimize temptation. Smoking is bad for you, and I don’t think you smoke anyway, so it’s probably the other rules that are bothering you. My dear Sam, Bert and I are devout Baptists, our religion doesn’t permit the consumption of alcoholic beverages, and we expect you to respect that.”

“OK, since you’re being so nice to me and putting me up for the summer, and paying my tuition, the least I can do is give up drinking.”

“That also means no bars, frat parties, or anyplace else alcohol is consumed.”

“Ok Doc, if you say so. You obviously have my best interest at heart, or you wouldn’t have offered to let me stay here.”

“Sam, you’re going to be too busy to miss it all. I’ve an idea. Your last name is Stone, correct? You can’t be a granddaughter, but how about I introduce you as my niece. Most of my family isn’t from around here, and it will avoid any awkward questions. You can still be from Alaska, because someone is going to locate your transcripts, and you can say you transferred to UNC to stay with us because the housing costs were too high, and UNC is a better college anyway. Any problems with that story?”

Samantha realized that she had to tell people something, but she didn’t want to lie. Still, it was most of the truth, except she didn’t know Doc Richards from Adam.

“Ok Doc, if we’re going to pull this off, I need to know something about your family. I can assume they will ask about my parents, etc. You didn’t have a relative that had kids, and recently died did you?”

“Nope, I’m the oldest of 4 siblings; I have 2 sisters and 1 brother. Both sisters are on the west coast, and I haven’t seen them in years. The brother is a big New York Lawyer, and a total jerk. I don’t even speak to him. Both of my sisters have kids your age; you might be able to pull this off. Besides, you only need to do it for 4 years.”

“What if I decide to go to medical school?”

“Sam, don’t worry, by then people won’t give a rip what happened to you in Alaska, because they will know you from here. If you want to go to medical school, and you’ve got the grades to get accepted to our medical program to get an MD, I’ve got the money. But the money is conditional on you following the rules, and keeping your grades up.”

“Don’t worry about that Doc. The only reason I wanted to be a nurse was I couldn’t afford to

become a doc. I really want to specialize in Emergency Medicine.”

“Good for you Sam, there is a great need for more ER docs.”

Doc Richards walked into the parlor, made a phone call, and was back in a minute.

“Sam, if you want to see him Reverend Whitaker is free this afternoon.”

“Good idea Doc, the sooner I get past this the better. Lead on McDuff.”

Doc walked into the parlor again and was back in a minute. “Nelson is bringing the car around.”

10 minutes later, Doc and Sam were shown into Rev. Whitaker’s study/office. Doc shook the Reverend’s hand like an old friend. Sam looked like a person facing a firing squad.

“Sam, I’m Reverend Whitaker, but you can call me Bob if it makes you feel better.”

“Thanks Bob, as you can imagine, I’ve never been inside a church before, or met an actual Reverend before. My Dad was an Atheist, and Mom never was much of a church-goer.”

“Sam, I understand, I know from talking with Doc that you’ve had a couple of really bad experiences, including the recent death of your mother, and a sexual assault at college, is that correct?”

“Bob, also the time in between wasn’t a picnic either.”

“OK. Doc, will you excuse us please, I think Sam and I can take it from here.”

“Sam, when you’re finished, have Bob call the house, and we’ll send the car. Reverend, thanks for everything.”

Doc walked out to the limousine, and Nelson drove him home.

Bob spent the next couple of hours using conventional psychotherapy techniques, since she wasn’t ready for the Christian approach. Finally she blurted out, “Reverend, why do you think this happened?”

“You mean why did God allow this to happen to you. Well for one thing, God allows us free will, and unfortunately people chose to do evil rather than good, and those choices have consequences. I’m not talking about punishment here; I mean if you stick your hand in a fire, the natural consequence is you get your hand burned. What happened to you was evil beyond measure, but you have to understand that drinking, while in itself is not evil, when you get

drunk, evil things can happen to you, since in your intoxicated state, it's easier for evil people to do things to you, or you might drive since at the same time your judgment is impaired, and either hurt yourself or someone else. That's why Baptists don't drink. It's not that the Bible is against it, matter of fact alcohol in moderation, like a glass of wine with dinner, really won't hurt you. But since we as fallen people lack self-control, we decided not to take that first drink."

"OK, Reverend, I understand why you don't drink, but that still doesn't answer my question, why me?"

"Another truism of Christianity is that God can use evil for good. He doesn't cause the evil, we do, but he can use those evil circumstances for good. When you got back, you met Ron, right?"

"Of all the people I could have met in Anchorage, he was the one person I needed to meet to stop what was happening to me. He loved me, but refused to have sex with me. Instead, he took the time to hold me, listen to me, and help me put my life back together, then 4 days later, he saved my life again when my Dad found out and went berserk. He risked his life to save mine. And Mom sacrificed her life to save mine."

"Sam, I want to read one verse out of the New King James Version of the Bible."

Sam nodded, and he opened to John Chapter 15 Verse 13 and read "Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends."

Sam started to cry, and finally Bob asked her "Sam what does that mean to you?"

"What I already knew, that my Mom loved me enough to die for me."

"Did you know that someone else died for you almost 2,000 years ago, and he loves you even more than your Mother?"

"You're talking about Jesus?"

"Sam, you remember the story of Genesis, and original sin?"

"Yes, I've heard it before."

"Sam, it says that the wages of sin is death. Thanks to Adam and Eve, sin entered the world, and we were all under a death sentence. Jesus loved each of us so much that he couldn't stand the thought of spending eternity without us, so he took on human form, was born as a man, and sacrificed his own life on the Cross. He didn't have to die, he was God after all, and with a thought, he could have been back in Heaven, not suffering an excruciating death. A perfect God took our place, and God's sense of Justice was satisfied. He paid the price for each of us,

and set us free.”

Sam broke down and cried, and in her tears she realized that all this pain had a purpose, and she would never have had the opportunity to become a doctor in Alaska, and that a very strange series of coincidences got her here. The probability of that happening by random chance were 10 times the chances of winning the lottery without buying a ticket. Maybe there really was a God. And if Reverend Whitaker was telling the truth, there was a way out of this mess.

“Bob, I’m tired of living like this, what do I have to do?”

“Ok, you’ve made the first step, you realized you are powerless to run your own life. How about letting God run it for you. He has your best interest at heart. All he wants to do is love you.”

“You mean like Ron?”

“Sam, Ron’s love has limits. He’s human. God is Eternal and Omniscient, meaning he is all-powerful, and can do anything. Best of all, he loves you even more than Ron does.”

“OK, at this point I’ll try anything.”

For the next two hours Reverend Whitaker led her through the process, one step at a time, and when they were finished, Sam gave her life to Christ, and the transformation was amazing, like the transformation of Mary Magdalene from a demon-possessed Prostitute to a loving disciple of Christ. Sam just glowed. She realized that everything that happened to her in her past was gone, destroyed, and buried under the blood of Christ.

“Sam, I think we can dispense with any further Therapy, but I’m sure you’ll want to talk with me for spiritual counseling.”

“Of course Reverend.”

Reverend Whitaker took a leather bound New King James Version of the Bible out of a cupboard and wrote in it, “Happy Birthday Sam. June 1, 2005 God Bless, Reverend Whitaker”

Sam wanted to hug the stuffing out of him, but realizing she was braless, she was embarrassed. She remembered what Ron had said, and decided then and there that she would dress more modestly. Luckily, Ron had some say in what she bought in the mall, and none of the clothes were what Steve would call “slutty”. She thanked the Reverend, and asked that he call the house, she was ready to go home. That thought struck her - she was HOME. When she got home, she asked where her suitcases were, and was shown to her room. She closed the door, and changed clothes, and for the first time in her life wore a bra. It took her a while to put on. Finally Bert knocked on the door. “Sam are you OK?”

“Bert, I’m having problems with this bra.”

“Is it OK if I come in and help you?”

Sam’s need to dress modestly overcame her fear, so she said “OK”. Bert came in, and helped her adjust the straps, hooks etc.

“What a lovely bra dear.”

“I’ve never worn one before, Ron made me buy a couple so I wouldn’t give Doc a heart attack.”

“I did see him reaching for his medicine.”

“Sorry Bert, I just didn’t know any other way - My Dad treated me like dirt, and called me a little slut when I was growing up. After I was raped, I thought I deserved it, so I started acting the part. Now that I gave my life to Christ, I don’t want to act like that anymore.”

“Good for you dear. Later if you want we can go shopping.”

“I’d like that, I still feel a little too sexy wearing this bra.”

“Sam, that bra was designed for display instead of coverage. If you look in the mirror, you’ll see it accents your cleavage more than if you were braless.”

Sam didn’t want to be topless in front of Bert, but she didn’t want to wear this bra anymore.

“Bert, do you have any bras that would fit me?”

“Sure dear, we’re about the same size. I’ll be back in a minute.”

Bert came back 5 minutes later with a more modest bra that still looked like a young woman would wear it. It had a pretty lace pattern.

“Sam, I wore this years ago, hopefully it fits.”

Sam tried it on, and it fit perfectly, and she felt better because this bra didn’t expose most of her breasts. She put her shirt back on, gave Bert a hug, and almost said “Thanks Mom” then started crying, remembering what happened to her mom. They both sat on the bed with Bert holding her in a motherly fashion. When Sam finally stopped crying, she explained why she was crying.

“Sam, I can never be your Mom, but I can be your friend.”

“I’d like that Bert.”

“Want to go shopping?”

“Sure, I’m going to need some new shirts and bras at least.”

Bert gave Sam a hug, dried her tears, then they walked to the parlor, where Bert told Doc they were going shopping. Doc noticed Sam wasn’t braless anymore, and if his memory served, she was wearing the bra Bert wore when they were married. In a way, it was fitting, because Sam was starting a new life as well. Doc called the limousine, and Bert grabbed her purse.

They came back 2 hours later with a whole new wardrobe for Sam. Overall, it was much more conservative than the clothes she bought with Ron.

Meanwhile, back in Alaska...

Ron had made it to Allakaket, filled up the tank on his Cessna, and flew home. When he landed, he held his Mom and cried like he had lost his best friend. He hoped going to the Academy would help him keep his mind off her, then he got the shock of his life when Steve reminded him that he had to be at least 17 and a half to enter the academy, and no waiver was possible. Ron was stuck here for another year, and he was miserable. He felt like running to Samantha and chucking it all, and wrote a letter to Doc telling him how he felt.

2 days later he read Doc’s reply:

Ron:

Sam says Hi - I didn’t let her read your letter, but I told her you wrote.

What you did was a noble thing, and the right thing. Sam wants to become an ER doctor, and we can afford to put her through Medical School. She was studying to be a Nurse because she realized she couldn’t afford to go to Medical School, or she’d be in debt for the rest of her life. Thanks for helping get her out of that miserable situation. I’ve got great news, the other day, Sam gave her life to Christ, you should see the transformation - She’s a new person.

“If you love something, set it free.” I know you miss her now, but if you followed through on your plans, you’d destroy both your lives. While she’ll always be grateful, she’s not in love with you, and if you were to get together, it might be fun for a while, but the results would be disastrous.

Please don’t write another letter like that, or you might undo all the good you’ve done. Sam’s been accepted to the UNC Medical School in the fall.

God Bless,  
Doc



## Chapter 98 - Good News - Bad News

Ron flew to Anchorage the next day to pick up some packages. When he got within radio range of Anchorage, he was told the Maintenance Chief at Elmendorf wanted to see him about his DeHaviland, and he could divert to Elmendorf if he wanted. Ron said “OK, will divert to Elmendorf. Please advise the Chief that I am 15 minutes out.”

“Roger, Anchorage Control out.”

Ron switched frequencies to Elmendorf’s tower, and received permission to land, and which space to taxi to. He pulled into his assigned space, and the Maintenance Chief met him.

“Ron, I’ve got good news and bad news. First of all, your DeHaviland will never fly again; the main spar broke between landing and sling loading it here. But, the Aerospace Museum has offered \$100K for it as a static display. Seems your DeHaviland has some historic value. I did some checking, and the Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) has several Grumman Gooses for sale. They’re military surplus, and I know the Maintenance Chief at the Wing 19 AMS at Vancouver Island in British Columbia. All their surplus planes have been mothballed, covered in plastic, and the engines and avionics have been pulled.”

“What good is that going to do me?”

“Patience Young Skywalker, I’m getting to it. Allison designed and tested several turboprop engines for the Goose to upgrade them in the 1950’s. When the military obsoleted the Goose and most other flying boats, they modified the engines to use them in the C-130. I know that they have 2 engines sitting there with less than 500 hours on them, with the reversible pitch props. They’d probably let you have them for next to nothing. They’re in storage as Military Surplus with all the controls and everything you need. If I contact my friend at the RCAF, he can pull the Goose that’s in the best shape, install the Allison turboprops, and a full avionics suite for less than \$250,000.00.”

Knowing that if he sold the DeHaviland, he could buy the Goose and get it fully restored and airworthy for less than \$150,000 in cash Ron told the chief to get a quote from everyone involved. He asked the Chief where the DeHaviland was, he had some personal property to remove. The chief went with him and helped him remove the GPS antenna and the radio repeater, plus all the brackets for his medical and survival gear since they were not DeHaviland or Civil Aviation modifications, and the museum would have to remove them anyway. They could fill in the small holes in the roof when they restored it. Ron was sad to leave his old friend behind, but was glad that he was getting a much bigger, faster, and newer plane in exchange for only 150 thousand out of his pocket. He put the box in the Cessna, then gave the chief his e-mail address so he could send him the quotes. He flew to the Anchorage airport to talk to Dan at the FAA office.

“Dan, I’ve got a problem. I crash landed the DeHaviland when I had an engine fire, and it will never fly again. But, the Maintenance Chief at Elmendorf has a deal for me. The RCAF has several Grumman Goose airplanes in mothballs at their airbase on Vancouver Island. He knows where he can get his hands on several Allison Turboprops that they built for the Goose, but never installed since the military got rid of them after the war. Anyway, the long and the short of it is if everything comes together, I’m going to have a new twin engine plane in time for hunting season next year.”

“Ok Ron, you’re going to need several new licenses and ratings to fly that plane. If I remember, it’s a twin engine 8 passenger sea plane. That means you’re going to need your IFR, Sea, Twin and a couple of other ratings. You might be better off getting your Airline Transport Pilot rating, which will cover all that, and if you petition the FAA, I’m sure they’ll grant you a commercial route from Anchorage to Allakaket. That way you can fly passengers from Anchorage to Allakaket, then transfer them to smaller float planes if necessary to fly them to their lodges, and you can own the whole thing, and make money whether you fly or not.”

“OK Dan, where’s the nearest place to get my ATP?”

“We can handle that here, we have an IP that’s certified for everything you need for an ATP. Since you already have your commercial, VFR, and Sea ratings, it should only take a month and maybe 5-10 thousand dollars to get your ATP. If you want, I can start the paperwork now for you.”

“Go ahead, I can’t fly anything but 3 passengers at a time with the Cessna, and it’s so slow I want to get out and push.”

“Ok Ron, I’ll put in the paperwork.”

“Can I borrow your phone?”

“Sure - local call?”

“I wanted to call the Chief at Elmendorf and tell him to expedite getting that plane.”

Dan handed Ron the phone, and he dialed the chief’s direct number “Chief, its Ron. I talked to the FAA, and I need you to expedite getting that Goose put back together and get and airworthiness certificate on it.”

Once he got off the phone Dan said “Ron, you forgot to tell me it didn’t have an airworthiness certificate.”

“Ok Dan, here’s the rest of the story. The RCAF 19 Wing Aircraft Maintenance Service will be restoring and certifying the plane.”

“Ok, we can accept a RCAF certificate. Just make sure they put FAA approved avionics in it.”

“My understanding is that the plane is gutted, and they have to install new avionics anyway, so I’m going with a full FAA approved Avionics suite including a glass cockpit set-up.”

“That will be great.”

Suddenly the phone rang, it was the Chief for Ron.

“Chief what’s up?”

“He’s got 3 Gooses on the line that all have low airtime, and can easily be restored for the prices I quoted. He wanted us to fly down and pick one. There’s a VIP plane here that needs to get some airtime, and they said they’d love to fly to Vancouver.”

“OK, let me call my parents, and I’ll be right over.”

“Don, I need to call Bill - they want me to fly to Vancouver to check out the planes.”

“Ok - here you go.”

“Bill, its Ron. I’m in a hurry. I need you to tell my parents I’m flying to Vancouver BC with the Maintenance Chief from Elmendorf to check out a Grumman Goose to replace my DeHaviland. I’ll probably have to stay in Anchorage tonight, so I’ll see them tomorrow. Thanks.”

As soon as Ron hung up the phone, he thanked Dan and was out the door. He jumped in his plane, started the motor, and called the tower for permission to transfer back to Elmendorf. Next he radioed Elmendorf and got landing instructions. 20 minutes later he taxied up next to the VC-120 that the Chief was standing next to.

“Hurry up, we’re burning daylight.”

“Ok, Chief, right behind you.”

Ron ran up the air stairs and plopped into a seat. The crew chief pulled up the air stairs, and as soon as they were locked, the pilot started the engines and taxied to the runway. 4 hours later they were landing in Vancouver. Chief Smith walked down the air stairs first, followed by Ron. They were met on the runway by the Maintenance Chief of the RCAF 19 Wing AMS, Chief Nichols, who saluted in the British fashion. Chief Smith returned the salute, and they hugged like long lost buddies, which wasn’t too far from the truth. Chief Nichols turned to Ron and said “So you want to buy a Goose?”

“Yes Chief - I need one for now, and if my plans come together, I’ll need another one. I’ve got over \$2 Million in the bank, so I can easily afford to do this. I’m planning on starting a short-haul rural airline in Alaska, called Allakaket Airlines.”

“Well, the Goose is definitely the bird for the job. I like Chief Smith’s idea to replace those radial wasp engines with turboprops. They will just about double your horsepower without any extra strain on the mounts, plus the reversible pitch props will really improve the STOL capabilities of the plane. You’ll be able to take off shorter, and land on a postage stamp sized lake.”

“How would that be?”

“Ron, the reversible props allow you to stop short. Once you’re down on the water, reverse the pitch, and increase the throttle, and you’ll stop like you threw out an anchor. With the high wing, there is no chance of damaging the props with this maneuver.”

“Cool - what does that do to my speed and payload?”

“With the Allison turboprop engines, lightly loaded you should be able to fly as fast as the C-130 or about 300 knots. Your payload should go from 2000 pounds to over 3500. You’d only be limited by the strength of the frame.”

“Why didn’t they build the Goose with a loading ramp like the C-130?”

“Good question, why don’t you ask Grumman? I don’t know why anyone designs their planes the way they do. My guess is it was designed as a Miniature Catalina Flying Boat, and it doesn’t have a ramp.”

Ron wondered how tough it would be to design an amphibian with a cargo ramp like the C-130.

“So you want to see the planes?”

They got into the Chief’s jeep, and drove down the flight line. Finally they drove to the boneyard. There were A-6 Intruders, Buffalos, a couple of F4-U’s and at the end of the line 6 Grumman Goose all wrapped in plastic with the engines removed.

Chief Nichols told Ron, “They’re well preserved, and after we install the engines and avionics, we’ll do a second inspection and issue the airworthiness certificate.”

“Chief, could you do me a favor and inspect the airframes before you start, and select the 2 that are in the best shape first. I really don’t want to pay for a plane that has less than 10 or 20 years left in it.”

“Ron when we’re finished, the only reason these planes couldn’t fly anymore is if you couldn’t find parts to maintain the engines. Chief Smith told me he has a line on 6 complete Allison Turboprop engines that were designed for the Goose but never installed since the military declared them surplus before they finished testing the engines. The engines are fully FAA certified, but they were never installed, since most civilian pilots like the easier to maintain Wasp engines. Since you’re using them for commercial applications, and have the money, it would be worth the extra expense to gain the speed and payload.”

“Chief Nichols, you’re sure you can install the engines and all the avionics including the Glass cockpit for under \$250 thousand?”

“Easily. The plane costs \$50 thousand as surplus, the engines are another 50, and the avionics and labor should be way less than 100. I’d say we could do them for \$220 Thousand delivered, with the 30 thousand in reserve in case we come across the unexpected.”

“OK, if you can do it for less than \$250 thousand each painted, with an Airworthiness certificate the FAA will accept, and a full avionics suite and a full interior, you’ve got a deal.”

“What do you mean a full interior?”

“According to the spec sheet, the plane is capable of handling 8 passengers, so I need 8 FAA spec passenger seats, all the hardware and essential interior equipment to use it as a passenger aircraft. I don’t give a rip about a commode or anything, since it’s going to double as a freight hauler. I don’t want a VIP interior; I do need easily removable FAA spec seats.”

“Ok Ron, the seats are extra. Do you want cabin lights, etc?”

“Just what the FAA says I have to have. I don’t want fancy fixtures, or anything that sticks way out, or any overhead compartments, since this is also a freight hauler.”

“Ok, if I remember correctly, all you need is the FAA spec seats. I’ll add an easily removable carpet runner that will come out with the seats. I can still do it for less than \$250 thousand.”

“OK, e-mail me a contract not to exceed \$250 thousand, and I’ll sign and send it back.”

“Any preferences to paint color?”

“How about basic white. I’ll e-mail you with the tail number the FAA gives me, and you can stencil it on when you paint it. Is there anything I’m forgetting?”

“Parachutes?”

“Real Funny Chief Nichols. We’ll be flying below 5,000 feet most of the time, so the only

thing a parachute would do is to soften the splat and make a smaller stain.”

“Ok, no parachutes - that will save you \$50.”

“How soon can you have it done?”

“A month or 2 after Chief Smith delivers the motors. I can get the avionics at cost, and I know exactly what you’ll want. Radios up the wazoo, a GPS Moving map navigation system, digital altimeter, air speed indicator, artificial horizon, all the engine instruments, etc.”

“Did you include a fire suppression system?”

“Can’t get an airworthiness cert without it. I’m going to upgrade the system from Civilian to Military grade for a little overkill. We’ve got surplus stuff lying around like you wouldn’t believe.”

“Can you install a cross-band radio repeater I have?”

“Have Chief Smith send it, and we’ll install it no charge.”

“Nice doing business with you Chief Nichols.”

The three of them drove back to the VC-120 for the ride home. Chief Smith was full of questions on the return trip, and was taking extensive notes. Ron had a checkbook on him, so he wrote Chief Smith a check for the engines, and asked for a receipt showing what he paid for them. He’d pay Chief Smith’s actual cost, plus shipping and a 10% finder’s fee. Chief Smith was happy to help, and the \$5,000 dollars would help too. When they landed, Chief Smith made a few phone calls, and said the engines were being shipped to Vancouver as they spoke. Ron handed him the cross-band repeater, and asked Chief Smith to ship it to his buddy for installation in the plane. Since it was getting late, Ron asked Chief Smith if he wanted to go out for dinner. He had to turn Ron down, his wife had dinner waiting, but he’d give him a ride into town. Ron grabbed his overnight bag out of the Cessna, and walked to Chief Smith’s truck. He dropped Ron off at the Inn, and Ron checked in. They had a room available, and he threw his bag on the bed, and went next door for dinner.

The next morning, Ron drove over to the Airbase, got into his plane, and flew back to Anchorage, then walked into the FAA office. Dan said “Back already?”

“Ok Dan, the plane will be ready in two months. How long will it take to get my ATP cert?”

“I talked to the DC office. Normally they don’t issue ATP certs to anyone under 18. When they found out you had been flying a DeHaviland as a commercial pilot for the last 2 years, and landing on postage stamp sized lakes, they decided you were qualified. You have to pass a

written test, and I found an IP with 2,000 hours in the Goose who said it would be easier to use the Goose to teach you. You've got 2 months to study this stack of manuals."

Dan handed him a stack of manuals almost 3 feet high. Ron knew what he was going to do this winter. He carried the books out to the plane, taxied over to the pumps, filled the tank, and called the tower for permission to fly home. Since he wasn't flying anywhere soon, he set the GPS for his home, and was home 3 hours later. After he unloaded the plane, he told him Mom and Dad what he was up to.

He sent Bill an e-mail, and he thought it was an excellent idea. Making Allakaket a travel hub would increase business for the entire town, and he would need to install bigger fuel tanks. He read Ron's e-mail, and saw that the plane used jet fuel, so he sent Ron an e-mail making sure he ordered the right type. Ron sent an e-mail back telling Bill that the Allison turboprop engines used JP-4. Bill had a 5,000 gallon tank that he wasn't using, so he would order enough JP-4 to fill it when Ron got his plane. His fuel supplier could deliver 5,000 gallons per trip, so keeping Ron's plane full wouldn't be a problem. Ron kept in touch with Chief Nichols via e-mail while he was studying for his ATP license. He was pleased that there were no complications, and by swapping out the old rusted military spec fuel tanks, that were designed to stand up to .50 caliber fire with the FAA spec fuel tanks, he was able to greatly extend his range. The Allison engines slid right in like they were built for the plane (which they were), and they had almost finished the structural work. The plane would be ready for inspection and certification as soon as they got the avionics in and got the plane painted. 2 weeks before the plane was to be delivered, Ron e-mailed Dan at the FAA office, and told him he was ready for his written test. Dan told him to fly to Anchorage tomorrow morning, but to be prepared to spend all day at the FAA office, and he might want to stay overnight. Ron packed his overnight bag, and got plenty of sleep. The next day he flew to Anchorage early in the morning. Ron would be glad when he got his Goose, this low and slow stuff was for the birds.

When he got to the FAA office, Dan told him to have a seat in the testing cubicle, and brought him 4 #2 pencils, the test booklet, and a simple calculator, explaining that the FAA was very strict about what he could use to pass the test. Dan said he had 8 hours to complete the test. 6 hours later, Ron turned his test in. Dan was amazed; most people needed the full 8 hours. He stuck the test in the scoring machine, and 2 minutes later he received a 95% score. Since 80% was passing, Dan gave Ron the good news. Now all he needed was his "behind the wheel" training. Ron went shopping, and stayed overnight then flew back home the next day. He gave his mom and dad the good news, but they didn't seem too interested or concerned.

A week and a half later, Chief Nichols sent an e-mail to Ron telling him his Goose was done. Ron forwarded the message to Dan at the FAA office, and asked him if the IP would be available tomorrow to pick the plane up at Vancouver Island. Dan replied saying the IP was available. Next Ron sent an e-mail to Chief Smith asking if he could get a lift to Vancouver Island to pick up the Goose. Chief Smith replied that a VC-120 would be available tomorrow morning. Ron copied it to Dan, asking if the IP could meet him at Elmendorf tomorrow

morning at 0900. Dan said he'd make sure the IP was there at 0900. Ron copied everything to Chief Smith, who said that the plane would be ready at 0900. Ron packed an overnight bag just in case, and told his Mom and Dad that he was going to Vancouver Island to pick up his new plane, and he was leaving early in the morning. Anne made some more muffins, and had a thermos of coffee ready to go the next morning.

Ron arrived at Elmendorf at 0850 the next morning, and was glad he was getting his new plane, this low and slow stuff was really getting old! He secured his Cessna, and at 0900 sharp, they were wheels up en route to Vancouver Island. 4 hours later, they arrived at RCAF 19 Wing AMS, and were greeted by Chief Nichols, who drove them to the plane. When Ron saw the Goose, he thought he had never seen a more beautiful plane. Chief Nichols had painted the plane basic white, with a blue stripe down each side, and Allakaket Airlines in blue flowing script above each stripe. The FAA assigned tail number NA17539 was stenciled on both sides of the tail in the same color of blue. Chief Nichols opened the cockpit door, and Ron stepped into the pilot's seat, and Nick (the IP) stepped into the co-pilot seat. Chief Nichols pulled up a chair behind them, and talked Ron through all the controls. Since this was a remodel instead of a restoration, they relocated the twin throttles on a console between the pilots, and installed the moving map display right above it. The pilot and co-pilot had a multi-functional display in front of them displaying the Artificial Horizon, Airspeed, Heading, altitude, and time to next waypoint.

Once Ron and Nick were familiar with the controls, Chief Nichols talked then through the startup and pre-flight checks. With an on-board APU, the engines were easy to start. Once the engine gauges were in the green, Chief Nichols switched the radio to the RCAF tower and requested permission for a familiarization flight. Since the pattern was wide open, the tower approved, so they advanced the throttles from idle, and the propellers started spinning. Ron was amazed that the engines and propellers were so quiet inside the cockpit. Chief Nichols handed each of them a headset, and put one on himself so they could hear each other, and the radio. As they taxied toward the runway, Nick talked Ron through setting the Goose up to take off. He said as lightly loaded as the plane was, it should take off at around 70 knots. When they reached the runway, Ron turned onto the runway, called "Rolling" so the tower knew they were on the active runway, and advanced both throttles to full. 10 seconds later they were airborne. They flew several big circles around the field, and when they were satisfied that everything was as it should be, Ron called the tower for permission to land. Nick told him the plane could land at any speed between 50 and 80 knots depending on how he configured the flaps, and the angle of attack. The plane could also make an emergency high-speed landing at 120 knots in the event the flaps didn't work, but they needed a smooth runway or flat water, it would be rough but it would work. Since they were landing on a runway, Ron lowered the landing gear, and set the plane up for an 80-knot landing. He kissed the runway, bounced slightly, and settled down to taxi off the end of the runway. Nick said "Not bad for a first landing with this big of a plane.

They taxied up to the fuel depot, and they filled the 500 gallon fuel tanks. Chief Nichols signed the receipt, and then Ron handed him a check for the balance on the plane. Chief Nichols



handed him a huge folder and a box full of paperwork including the manufacturer's manuals and everything he needed to know about the plane, and a ton of FAA paperwork he needed to file. Ron was glad he knew the UTM coordinates of Elmendorf AFB, because he needed to program the nav computer since it wasn't loaded in the memory. He'd make sure he'd remedy that situation as soon as he got to Elmendorf and got his portable GPS unit. The plane's paperwork said it had a fuel capacity of 500 gallons of JP-4 in the main tanks, and 50 gallons in an auxiliary tank for the APU. Nick asked Ron if he were ready to fly back to Elmendorf, and Ron showed Nick where he had already programmed the moving map navigation unit with the UTM coordinates of Elmendorf AFB. Nick thought this kid was really smart. Ron called the tower and received permission to take-off, and advised the tower their destination was Elmendorf AFB. The tower assigned them an altitude of 10,000 feet until they contacted Elmendorf when they entered their airspace. They were told they were next for take-off.

Since he had a long over-water flight, Ron didn't push the throttle so far this time, and took off at a more sedate rate, and slowly climbed to 10,000 feet, where he engaged the autopilot. He really didn't need one, but it came with the instrument suite he ordered. Once the autopilot was engaged, they were heading NNW at around 250 knots, which was their best fuel economy cruise speed. He could have pushed it to 280, but at that speed, his range went from 2,000 miles to 1500, and it was almost 1200 miles to Elmendorf, and he'd rather not arrive at Elmendorf bingo fuel. He turned and talked to Nick for the rest of the flight, and learned some interesting quirks about the Goose. With the reversible turboprops, it could land on smaller lakes than the Cessna, and it's climb rate was twice that of the DeHaviland. The downside of this was the twin Allison turboprop engines gulped fuel at a prodigious rate, and required maintenance 4 times as frequently as the Wasp engines it replaced. But, it had a top speed over 300 knots, could cruise at 250 all day, could take off and land in half the runway distance, and could carry almost double the payload when configured as a cargo plane. The standard Goose top speed was only 184 knots, which was the same as the DeHaviland, and it only had an 800 mile range with the small 140 gallon tank.

Ron left Nick in charge of the plane, and went back to the passenger cabin to check out the accommodations. The seats were nice, but not brand new, which was OK by him, since most of the passengers would be hunters and fishermen. He was pleased to see that they had followed his instructions, and not included all the extra creature comfort items that a dedicated passenger plane came with. The cabin was fairly quiet, so they left the interior sound deadening materials in place. Ron walked back to the cockpit, and got back in his seat. He told Nick that Chief Nichols had done a really good job outfitting the plane. He had paid only \$220 Thousand dollars in total for the plane, and the Aerospace Museum had paid him \$100 Thousand for his DeHaviland, so he was only out less than \$150 Thousand for a plane that was faster, newer, and more powerful than the one that it replaced. 4 hours later, he called Elmendorf AFB, since they were almost into their airspace. Since they didn't have a radar transponder, he gave them his tail number and altitude. "Elmendorf Control this is Allakaket Airlines Number NA17539, requesting permission to land at Elmendorf AFB.

“Roger Allakaket Airlines, descend to 5,000 feet at 50 miles, then 2,000 feet for approach. Clear to land on Runway 27 Left. Call on final.”

“Roger Elmendorf, 5,000 at 50, 2,000 on approach, call on final for 27 Left.”

Nick said “Great radio procedure Ron, you confirmed their instructions, but didn’t waste their time. We can stay on this heading for another 75 miles, then we’ll have to turn to 270 degrees for approach.”

75 miles later, Ron turned so the plane was heading 270 magnetic, and descended to 2,000 feet, then lowered the landing gear. He called the tower when he was 5 miles out and set up to land “Allakaket Airlines on Final for Runway 27 Left.”

“Roger Allakaket, clear to land.”

Ron came in and landed smooth as glass on runway 27 Left, then taxied to the space assigned to them.

“Ron that was a prefect landing. Let’s go flying tomorrow, then I’ll sign off on your training, and refund half your fee. See you back here at 0800 tomorrow.”

Ron shut down the Goose, and locked up, then caught a ride to the main gate where he caught a cab to the Inn. He ate dinner and went to bed early, since he had to be back at Elmendorf at 0800 the next morning.

The next morning, Nick had Ron practice single-engine flying, stalls, and emergency procedures. Nick knew that Ron was a seasoned pilot, and could handle the aircraft, so they landed at Elmendorf, and he signed off on the ATP training. Ron left the Goose at Elmendorf, flew the Cessna back to Anchorage, and turned the paperwork into Dan, who issued his ATP endorsement. He told Ron the new ATP license would be in the office in two weeks if he wanted to pick it up. Ron asked him if he knew a private pilot who could fly his Cessna back to Allakaket, and he would fly him back to Anchorage that day. Dan said he was a pilot, and would love to get out from behind the desk. He forwarded the phone, called his supervisor and said he would be out of the office for the rest of the afternoon for a check ride, then Ron flew them back to Elmendorf. Ron remembered to fill the Goose full of JP-4, and top off the APU’s fuel tank, then Dan filled the tank of the Cessna full of Avgas. Ron and Dan both got permission from the tower to take off, and Ron kept his speed down to 180 knots so the Cessna wouldn’t be too far behind. When he got close to Allakaket, he called the tower. “Allakaket Control, this is Allakaket Airlines Number NA17539 requesting permission to land.”

“Ron, what kind of joke is this?”

“Tower, look to your northwest, it’s No Joke, I’m flying a Grumman Goose, and My call sign is

now Allakaket Airlines, since the FAA approved my application for a Rural commercial route, and I'm now a Air Transport pilot."

"Roger, Ron - Holy Cow. That thing is almost as big as the Catalina. OK, you're clear to land."

"Thanks Control, see you on the ground."

Ron flew an 80-knot approach, and coasted to a stop with plenty of room left without having to reverse his props. He turned and taxied toward the ramp, then extended his landing gear as he transitioned from water to land. Bill was waiting for him when he landed. Ron shut the big plane down, in time to see Dan land the Cessna. Dan must have kept his hand in it, because he made a textbook water landing. He taxied up to Ron, who pointed him to his parking space. Don shut down and climbed out. "Dang, I forgot how much fun a water landing was."

Ron introduced Dan and Bill, then asked Bill if he could borrow his radio. He handed Ron a handy talkie, and told him he had installed a repeater in the tower so anyone could talk on a handy talkie in Allakaket. Ron reminded Bill that his dad wasn't listening on the Allakaket frequency, so they jumped into his jeep for the quick drive to his office. Ron tuned Bill's radio to his dad's frequency. "Dad, this is Ron, do you read me?"

"Loud and clear son. What's up?"

"How would you and Mom like a ride in my new plane?"

"Sure son, where are you?"

"We're in Allakaket, and we'll be there in an hour. Meet us by the lake, since I'm pretty sure I can't turn this thing around by the cabin."

"Ok Son, see you then."

Ron turned the radio back to the frequency Bill had it on, and got a ride back to the plane. He got in the pilot's seat, and Dan took the co-pilot seat. He didn't need to fill up, since he only went maybe 300 miles, and he had over a 1500 mile range. Ron taxied back to the lake, and as soon as they were waterborne, retracted the landing gear and increased his taxi speed. When they got to the end of the lake, Ron told Dan to strap himself in because he was in for a thrill ride, and he shoved the throttle to full. When the airspeed indicator said 80 knots, he pulled the yoke into his lap, and zoom climbed over the ridge. Once he was clear of the ridge, he eased back on the yoke for a more sedate climb to 2,000 feet. 45 minutes later, they were at his lake. Dan looked down and said "There's NO way you're landing on that postage stamp."

"Dan I bought this plane especially for it's STOL capabilities, it has reversible pitch props, and

can land on a dime and give you 9 cents change. At full flaps, I can land at 50 knots, which is about the same as my Cessna. Once I hit the water, all I have to do is reverse the props and take the throttle to 1/3 power, and I stop like I threw out an anchor.”

“This I gotta see.”

Ron descended to 500 feet, cranked the flaps to full, and slowed to 50 knots. As he cleared the ridge, he touched the throttle, and the plane floated all the way down. 5 feet above the water, Ron pushed the nose over so it was on the horizon just like Nick told him, and they were down with a slight bump. Ron reached over and pulled the propeller pitch lever to Reverse, then brought the engines up to 30% power. Just like Nick said, they stopped like he had thrown out an anchor. They were bobbing in the middle of the lake, so Ron turned toward his parents’ cabin, and set the pitch back to the normal setting, and the throttles to the taxi position. Ron was whooping and Hollering. Dan was pretty excited too, but he left out the Whooping and hollering bit. This Goose was an amazing plane. It could fly at almost 300 knots, yet landed in half the distance of a low and slow Cessna 185. When he got close to shore, Ron deployed the landing gear, and taxied onto land. Ron decided to leave the Goose at Allakaket, and fly his parents back to home in the Cessna, because the excitement of landing like that might be too much for them. When Ron shut down, he walked back and opened the passenger door and extended the air stairs. Roy, Anne and Lucky were waiting for him. “Welcome Aboard Allakaket Airlines, watch your step.” Ron escorted them to their seats, and told them to buckle in. Ron walked back to the door, pulled in the air stairs, and secured the door.

When he got back to the cockpit, he started the engines, then flipped the switch on his headset to PA. “Welcome to Allakaket Airlines. This is your pilot Ron Williams. We offer non-stop service to Anchorage Alaska. In preparation for take-off, we ask you put your seats in the upright and locked position.” Dan looked at Ron and shook his head. Once the engine instruments were in the green, he pushed the throttles out of idle, then used the right engine to turn the plane around, by leaving the left engine at minimum, and the right throttle to ½ power. The plane turned easily, and he pulled back on the right engine until they were both at slow taxi until they were fully waterborne. Once they were waterborne, he retracted the landing gear, and advanced the throttles to fast taxi. When he reached the end of the lake, he made sure the navigation system was set up for return to Anchorage, then quickly set the plane up for take off. Once he was set, he advanced both throttles smartly to max, and pulled back sharply on the yoke as soon as the airspeed indicator read 80 knots. He held the climb until he cleared the ridge, then set the plane for a cruise climb to 2,000 feet and 250 knots indicated. An hour later, they were ready to land at Anchorage, so Ron called for permission, lowered the flaps and set the plane up for an 80 knot landing and lowered the landing gear. He made another textbook landing, and let the plane roll, since the runway was very long. He taxied right up to the FAA office to let Dan out.

“Ron, that was the best example of flying I’ve seen in a while. It was a pleasure to fly with you. Take care, and see you in 2 weeks so you can pick up your permanent ATP license.”

Ron looked at his watch. They had just enough time at 250 knots to make it home before dark. He walked back and asked his mom and dad if they'd rather fly home now or stay overnight.

Roy said, "If it's all the same to you, I'd rather sleep in my own bed."

Ron shrugged his shoulders, ran back up to the cockpit and taxied to the fuel pumps, and filled the plane with JP-4. He did a quick walk-around, started the engines and taxied toward the runway while configuring the plane for take-off and calling the tower for permission to take off. He got permission right as he reached the runway, so he acknowledged the call with "Allakaket Rolling", and was flying with 2/3 of the runway left. He climbed to 2,000 feet and 250 knots, and was calling Allakaket for landing clearance before he realized he was there. Since the lake was so huge, he set up for a 80-knot approach and set the plane down as smooth as glass. He taxied to his new parking spot and shut down. Lucky decided to make a pit stop during the transfer, and they all piled into the Cessna. It took much longer with the Cessna to get home, but Ron was sure Roy would have a heart attack if he did a short-field landing with him aboard. They taxied up to the house and into the hangar, then they walked into the house. Roy was so tired that he almost fell asleep in the rocking chair before dinner.

## Chapter 99 - The Teenage Tycoon

Ron, now that he had an airline, e-mailed Bill for advice. Bill replied that Ron would need insurance and needed to file Incorporation paperwork. Ron asked Bill what he should do when he went to the Academy. Ron suggested hiring other pilots to fly the Goose and fly smaller planes to serve the rest of his routes. Ron could fly the Goose between now and when he went into the Air Force. He also needed a reservation service, and baggage handling from Anchorage. He suggested contacting Alaska Airlines, since they were the major carrier in Alaska, and ask them for advice. Surfing the internet, Ron found the name of the CEO of Alaska Airlines, and sent him an e-mail with a scanned image of his FAA paperwork for the Rural Route. The CEO wrote back, saying he might be interested in using them as a feeder airline, and if that relationship were satisfactory, he would have access to their reservation system and baggage handling system in Anchorage. Ron replied with a request for details about the feeder airline relationship. The CEO responded that he would mail a huge package of paperwork to him in Allakaket. Ron suggested he pick it up in Anchorage, and if the CEO had the time, he'd like to give him a ride in his new Grumman TurboGoose. Ron also found out with his internet research that the CEO was a big fan of WWII Amphibians. He sent Ron a reply that he would love to, and his Secretary would make the arrangements in his schedule in the next couple of days.

2 days later Ron was winging to Anchorage to pick up William Ayer, the new CEO of Alaska Airlines. He called ahead, and the airport manager diverted him to a private terminal for Alaska Airlines. As he taxied up, he saw row upon row of corporate executive Gulfstreams, and a few PBY Catalinas painted the corporate colors. As he shut down, the head of Corporate Security was waiting for him, and he had a little black box in his hand. Ron let him aboard to sweep the plane, then he closed it after himself and waited at the foot of the air stairs for Mr. Ayer. Ron saw him walking toward the plane with a huge grin on his face. "Ron Williams, nice to meet you, I've always wanted to fly in a Grumman Goose, and now you've done exactly what I would have done with one. I'm assuming those are the mythical Turboprops Allison made for the Goose but never installed?"

"That's correct Mr. Ayer."

"Ron, please call me Bill."

"Ok Bill, would you like to fly in the co-pilot's seat?"

Bill's reaction was the same as if American Airlines wanted to sell their entire airline to him for \$1. "You Bet."

Ron walked around, opened the door for Bill, and Bill slid into the co-pilot's seat. His eyes bugged out at the modern avionics suite. "You did a complete remodel didn't you?"

“Yes sir, I brought the avionics up to current FAA state of the art. As you can see, it has a moving map navigation system, the glass cockpit setup, and an autopilot, although I can’t imagine needing one very often, but it did come in handy when we flew it back from Vancouver.”

“This was an RCAF Goose?”

“Exactly, it had been mothballed, the engines, avionics, and even the gas tanks had been removed. Without the Allison turboprops, it never would have flown. The Allisons greatly improve the STOL capabilities of the Goose, increased the top speed to almost 300 knots, and doubled the rate of climb and payload capability. I’m ordering another one built next year. I already have 2 more complete engines.”

“Ron, you have an excellent plane for this kind of route, what about the numerous bush pilots?”

“I plan on hiring several of them when I set Allakaket up as a rural hub. It’s centrally located for the interior of Alaska, it has a huge lake you could land a PBY Catalina on, and the Mayor has already installed most of the infrastructure to build it into a major rural hub. Between the Goose and the bush pilots, we can fly all of your passengers from Anchorage to any location in Central Alaska, and return them to you.”

“Ron, you’ve just described a feeder airline. It’s basically a mutual back scratching club. Since we’re the only major airline that services Anchorage, the relationship would really benefit Allakaket Airlines too.”

“Bill, do you want to go flying or talk business?”

Bill started laughing, and Ron handed him a headset. Ron started the turbines, and called the tower for permission to take off.

“Where to Bill?”

“I’d like to see Allakaket.”

“OK, but you have to remember, it’s only potential right now, it needs some work.”

“Ron when I started in the Airline business, it was all potential - I like getting in on the ground floor, and if you want, I could make suggestions that will save you time and Money.”

“Ok Bill, one question, Are you a Christian?”

“Funny you should ask that, most of the time being a Born Again Christian is a deal-breaker, but I don’t hide my faith, and I see you don’t either. Yes, I’ve been saved for almost 20 years

now.”

“Well that solves the trust issue. Ready to go flying?”

Ron reached over and programmed the nav system with the coordinates for Allakaket. They taxied over to the runway, and as soon as Ron received permission to take off, set the throttles to full, and soon the airspeed indicator indicated 80 knots. He did a max-performance take-off, and held the rate of climb until he was 1,000 ft AGL, then he eased off and climbed to 2,000 feet while turning toward Allakaket.

“Dang this baby really climbs.”

Ron set the Goose to cruise at 250 knots, and set the autopilot. Looking at the nav display, he saw that they would be in Allakaket in an hour.

“Would you like to fly it, or talk business?”

“Let’s talk, I can fly it later. You’ve got all your ducks in a row with the FAA, but I noticed you didn’t have any incorporation papers filed, or an insurance policy. If you want, I can help you with both, since I know a good commercial insurance company that writes policies for airlines, and I know the secretary of state personally. I think you might want to file a Subchapter C incorporation, since you don’t want to deal with stockholders. You’re going to need officers and board members. I’d suggest people you trust and can work with. Here’s the card of our corporate lawyer. He will know who can do your incorporation paperwork fast and inexpensively. You have to have your insurance in line before you fly paying customers, so get that next. Once you’re incorporated and insured, contact me again and we’ll process the paperwork to make you a feeder airline for Alaska Airlines. That will let you use our baggage handling facilities in the terminal, and our reservation system. You’ll need to hire a ground crew to load and unload, maintain, clean service and fuel the aircraft. The cheapest way to go is to contract those services. I’ll give you the info on our contractor, and you can call them. From what I’ve heard, you already have a lock on most of the lodges in your area. With the 8-passenger aircraft, you could double the number of lodges served, and grab the rest of them. I’m not sure if you’re required to have a co-pilot, but that is something you should check on to keep the FAA happy.”

“I asked Dan at the FAA about that, and as long as I’m flying under VFR, I can fly solo. But if the conditions dictate IFR rules, I must have a co-pilot.”

“That’s good to know, since 99.9% of your flying is going to be VFR, you are going to save \$\$\$.”

“Exactly. Paying a copilot means less profit.”



Ron looked at the Nav display, and noticed they were 15 minutes out of Allakaket, so he called for landing clearance. “Allakaket Control, this is Allakaket Airlines Number NA17539 requesting permission to land.”

“Pattern Clear NA17539, come straight in.”

Ron switched frequencies. “Bill, you might get to the flight line. I have someone here you’ll want to meet.”

“OK, Ron, I’ll be there in 15 minutes..”

Ron flew an 80 knot approach, and landed smooth as glass on the lake, then taxied to the ramp, deployed the landing gear, and transitioned to the land. Bill was waiting on the far side of the flight line, so Ron taxied up and shut down. Ron and Bill Ayer got out the plane at the same time. Bill recognized William Ayer from the stockholders prospectus, and walked over to him and shook his hand. “Mr. Ayer, it’s a pleasure to meet you, I’m glad you were able to turn Alaska Airlines around, my stocks were taking a beating.”

“You own stock in Alaska Airlines?”

“Sure do, bought 1,000 issues when it was still less than \$10 a share for preferred stock.”

“Did you say you own 1,000 shares of preferred stock - why haven’t I seen you at a stockholder’s meeting?”

“Never thought to attend, I didn’t realize I had enough stock to qualify.”

“Ron, talk about a small world, I fly over here to check out the site, and run into a stockholder. Bill would you please give me the grand tour?”

“It would be an honor.”

“Mr. Ayer, Bill is the Mayor of Allakaket, as well as the postmaster, banker, minister, and a couple of other hats I’m sure I’m forgetting.”

“Sounds like a couple of small towns I know. Bill, I’m really interested in the infrastructure, Ron wants to turn Allakaket into a rural air travel hub, and I want to turn Allakaket Airlines into a feeder airline. Travelers need certain goods and services, and there has to be adequate fuel and maintenance facilities here for the planes. So far, you have an FAA approved tower, and I saw the hangars and the fuel tanks. How would you like to double your fuel capacity?”

“I’d love to, but can’t afford to.”

“How about Aircraft Repair facilities?”

“We have one FAA Master Aircraft mechanic, and two technicians.”

“Any of them certified on Turbine Craft?”

“Just the master mechanic.”

“Do you have an Inn or lodge?”

“I’m part owner of the 10-room lodge right down the block. We’ve got a café called the Moose Café and the Lodge serves 2 meals a day, mostly for guests, but several residents have made arrangements to eat there.”

“Any problems getting food or supplies?”

“We used to have Ron’s DeHaviland, but now with the Goose, he can carry twice as much if he removes the seats.”

“Sounds like you’ve got a basic setup. After Ron gets his paperwork completed, I’ll authorize approval of his application to become a feeder airline for Alaska Airlines. I’ll pay to have a 10,000 gallon tank of JP-4 flown in, with the necessary equipment. I’d suggest doubling your capability to store Avgas, since those Bush pilots are going to be busy. How many of those rooms are available on the average.”

“Depends, some days we’re empty, others we’re full up.”

“How tough would it be to double the size of the inn if I could guarantee financing?”

“Could you bring in enough customers to keep it full?”

“Hopefully or there won’t really be a point in making Allakaket Airlines a feeder airline.”

“Ron if this takes off, you might have to buy that 2<sup>nd</sup> Goose sooner than you planned on. What kind of timeline do you need?”

“It took the RCAF 19Wing AMS 2 months from start to finish.”

“That’s fast. Great. You get the paperwork and insurance done, and send your application to my attention. Ron, are you ready to fly back to Anchorage?”

Ron guessed Bill Ayer was on a tight schedule, and couldn’t take too much time off at any one time. Bill drove them back to the airplane, and this time Ron talked Bill through the take-off

procedure. Bill took off perfectly, kept climbing until he was at 2,000 feet, and turned toward Anchorage. He hand flew the plane all the way back, and Ron called Anchorage, and got landing permission. He talked Bill through the landing procedure, and he made a textbook landing.

“I guess you’ve been flying for a while too?”

“I haven’t flown a twin in a while, but it was fun. Thanks for the ride Ron.”

They taxied up to the private parking area, and Bill got out of the aircraft after he shut it down. They talked as they walked. “Ron, if you’re interested, I can get you a membership in the Christian Businessman’s Association of Anchorage. We meet once a month on Saturday morning for a prayer breakfast. I’d recommend you get a suit, since they tend to wear suits at this meeting. Also, you should join the Chamber of Commerce, and the ATA. Give my lawyer a call, and he’ll get stuff rolling for you. See you later Ron.”

Bill Ayer shook Ron’s hand, then turned around and left. Ron jogged back out to the plane, taxied to the fuel depot, and filled the tanks full of JP-4. Seems the Goose wasn’t any more of a gas hog than the DeHaviland. Once he secured the filler caps, he walked around the plane, then got in, set up to fly to Allakaket, called the tower, and minutes later, was flying to Allakaket. Ron switched the Goose for the Cessna, or “Dumbo” as he called it, and flew home.

Later that afternoon, Ron discussed his plans with his parents, Ron thought they would be upset, but strangely they were very supportive. Ron asked his Mom, “What Gives, I thought you’d be mad if I didn’t go to the Academy?”

Anne said, “Ron, the only reason you wanted to go to the Academy was to be an officer in the Air Force, and fly the Strike Eagle. I was never that keen on it, because I knew it was 10 times more risky to fly military than civilian. Now that Jim gave you enough money to not only live comfortably, but to start your own airline, you don’t need to go to the Air Force to fly. Steve will be upset, but if you still don’t want to go when you turn 18, we’ll support that decision too. Most people get an education to earn the kind of money in a year that you can earn in 3-6 months flying here, and have the rest of the year basically to do whatever you want. Your father and I would love to be officers in your corporation, and we have a huge pile of money between us that we’ll never need, so if you want us to, we can invest \$50 Thousand each.”

“Mom, thanks for the offer, but money is not a problem right now, I still have over 1.5 Million in the bank, even after buying the plane. And I’ll bring in \$60-80 Thousand easily this year with the new plane, and I’m thinking of buying another Goose, and equipping it just for passenger use, since it will only cost another \$10 thousand to upgrade the interior to a much plusher interior.”

“Where are you going to get the pilots?”

“If the government guts the military like I think they are going to, there will be tons of qualified pilots out there in a couple of years.”

With his parent’s backing and blessing, Ron sat down to fill out the paperwork. He e-mailed the corporate attorney for Alaska Airlines, who was extremely helpful. He gave Ron a list of insurance brokers, rated for helpfulness and cost, and he took care of filing paperwork to list Allakaket Airlines as a Limited Liability, closely held corporation. Since the Secretary of State was a personal friend of Bill Ayer, they processed the paperwork within a week that normally took 6 months to a year. That afternoon, he received 6 offers for Corporate All-risk insurance. He was amazed at how expensive it was, but knew that any uninsured claim against him would result in bankruptcy. Two offers were within a thousand dollars of each other, so he took the one from the higher rated company. He had a rider e-mailed to him that afternoon. He was covered. When he finished the paperwork, he scanned and e-mailed all of it to William Ayer’s attention. 2 weeks later Allakaket Airlines was an official Feeder Airlines. Bill told him to fly to Anchorage, and wear a suit for the PR unveiling of the new relationship.

Ron flew to Anchorage the next day, and Bill said that they had a surprise for him. They had the plane’s exterior detailed, and the Alaska Airlines logo painted on the plane right over the rear quarter. It fit perfectly, and then Bill and Ron walked to the podium where Bill read a prepared speech, and presented Ron a check for a Million dollars. Ron was stunned, there wasn’t anything in the paperwork he read about a million dollar payment. After the media had disbursed, Bill informed him that the Board voted the payment as a show of good faith. Ron still owned his own airline, it’s just that the board thought that having Allakaket Airlines feeding passengers into their system directly would increase their business at least 5 million dollars the first year. Not that the fares would increase that much, but synergistic effects in the market would result in a 5 million dollar increase in the first year. They had agreed not to charge Allakaket for baggage handling or reservation services for the first year, and then to just charge their increased costs for the following years. Ron had contracted the same company that Alaska Airlines used for loading and unloading, and fueling the plane, and they made him a sweetheart deal.

2 weeks after the announcement, the lodges saw the writing on the wall, and were calling Bill asking Allakaket Airlines to service their lodge. Ron had retained Bill as a Business Manager for the Airlines, and paid him an annual salary worth double what he was making before. Allakaket Airlines bought the fuel farm from Bill, and Alaska Airlines hired a large helicopter to fly in a 10,000 gallon tank for JP-4, and another 5,000 gallon tank for Avgas. They cancelled the contract with the fuel company that was serving Allakaket when they found that the fuel company that was serving Alaska Airlines could deliver fuel 50% cheaper, and year-round, including JP-4, Avgas, Diesel, and unleaded regular or Kerosene if they wanted it. Bill received funding at a ridiculously low rate to remodel and expand the inn from 10 to 20 rooms, and to expand the kitchen and facilities, including its own self-generation capability courtesy of a military surplus 400KW diesel generator and a 5,000 gallon tank of diesel. There were plans later to expand the power systems of the community to include a year-round wind farm, and a

seasonal solar generating and hot water capability. Bill approved the designs, and construction began immediately. As lodges signed with Allakaket Airlines, the small pilots who were servicing them found themselves without a lodge to service, and turned to Allakaket airlines to earn money. Ron and Bill designed a very efficient system where the big planes brought the travelers to Allakaket, and the smaller planes flew them out to their lodges, which were usually within a half an hour to an hour of Allakaket. Even the guides relocated to Allakaket, since their customers could fly direct from Anchorage to Allakaket. That opened up a lot more of the interior of Alaska to hunting and fishing, because their smaller planes didn't have the range to fly all the way from Anchorage to the deep interior of Alaska efficiently. The effects snowballed, and soon Ron was forced to purchase a second Goose just to keep up with the volume. He moved from his parent's house as soon as it was apparent that he was flying 4 hours each day just to sleep and eat there. Bill rented him Jim's old house for a dollar a month, and Ron was much happier.

At the end of the first year's hunting/fishing season, Ron had earned \$100,000.00 after expenses, including fuel, insurance, paying the pilots, and maintenance. Between the payment from Alaska Airlines, and the additional \$100K, he was now worth almost 3 million dollars.

Roy and Anne were alone for the first time in over 17 years, and enjoyed the quiet and the togetherness. Ron made sure they had plenty of wood, food, and anything else they needed. Lucky was getting positively ancient, and spent most of his time sleeping on his bearskin rug. Roy and Anne spent time in their rocking chairs, fishing, gardening, or reading. They were now fully retired. They had done an excellent job raising Ron, and he was very proud of them. Ron spent what little spare time he had visiting his parents. When things settled down in the fall, he went hunting and got them a caribou, since they didn't eat a lot of meat anymore, but Roy still liked the taste of it, so Anne made mostly stews and other dishes that were mostly vegetables.

Ron was glad he took delivery of his second TurboGoose, and hired an ex-military pilot, who found the Friendly Skies weren't so friendly now that there were literally hundreds of out-of-work Air Force pilots. Seems Congress had decided to cut the military budget anyway, and George Bush had an idea. He would return all the Cargo and Transport planes back to the Army, since the Air Force started as the Army Air Force, and decommission all Air Force fighter wings that couldn't be used by the Marines or the Navy. Since the F-15 Strike Eagle didn't come with a tail-hook, what pilots couldn't find a job with the Marines soon found themselves RIF'd and their planes mothballed. There wasn't that much of a cost savings, except for closing the overseas Air Force bases, particularly Rhamstein AFB. It gave GW great pleasure to close that base, not because it was an Air Force base, but the Germans had been gouging us for basing rights since WWII, and now the local German economy was going into the tank. Some of the money went to improving our Special Forces capabilities, but not nearly enough. The United States would need a massive call-up of Reserves to fight a major battle, or even defend itself.

## Chapter 100 - Adjustments

Bill Ayer called Ron and asked for a meeting to review their contract. Since Ron wasn't busy, he asked Bill if he had time today to see him. Bill said to come on in; he'd make the time to see him. Ron flew the Turbo Goose to Anchorage, and was escorted to Bill's office. Bill was impressed that Ron had taken the time to change into a suit. He shook Ron's hand, and said "Ron, I've got some good news. We reviewed our costs, and basically we aren't experiencing any additional costs that can't be justified by the extra volume of travelers. I'd like to extend our agreement indefinitely to waive baggage and reservation services fees, subject to annual review." Ron breathed a sigh of relief, he was afraid the big airline would charge them for the cost of baggage handling, or at least reservations.

"Ron, I've got some really good news for you, it seems we forgot to include a profit-sharing agreement in your contract with Alaska Airlines. Since we give every other feeder airline 10% of the profit generated by their airline, we unilaterally modified your contract to match, and here's a check for \$100 Thousand dollars."

Ron nearly fainted; he was expecting the worst, now they were throwing money at him.

"Ron, one thing I'd like you to review would be ticket prices. If you could reduce ticket prices 20 %, you'd make the money back in volume with the extra passengers."

"Bill, I'll have to get with my accountant, and if he says we can afford it, I'll reduce fares 20% across the board. That will hopefully increase both our volumes, but I don't see being able to lower it much lower in the future, since the fuel costs are still going up."

"I noticed that too, I'll talk to the fuel supplier, and see if they can give us a better rate, since we're his primary customer."

"Anything Else Bill?"

"Yeah, your membership in the CBA and ATA have been approved. Our next prayer breakfast is next Saturday. If you dress like you're dressed now, you will make a good impression on them."

"Bill, why are you being so nice and helpful, not that I mind?"

"Ron, my honest answer is two-fold, the more Allakaket Airlines grows, the more money Alaska Airlines makes, and the more I make. Second of all, you're a young Christian Brother who could use a mentor and the kind of help I could have used when I was an up and coming entrepreneur. A lot of people are only going to be interested in what you have to offer them, and will try to get their hooks in you. I'll help steer you clear of them, and help you navigate

the sharks that lurk in the big business waters. Whether you know it or not, you're now in the big leagues, and there are a bunch of predators who would like to do nothing more than make a buck at your expense."

"Bill, I have to trust someone, and you seem trustworthy. I can definitely use an advisor and mentor."

"Ron, let's pray over this."

Ron walked toward Bill, who put his hands on Ron's shoulders and started praying over him like his Dad did. When they finished, Ron knew he was doing the right thing, and shook Bill's hand, then left. They were both busy people now.

Ron walked back out to his plane, which he saw had been washed, serviced, and fueled. A note on the cockpit door told him that the fuel and service were no charge, and had Bill's signature on it. Ron had an idea and taxied over to the FAA office.

"Dan, would there be any problems installing a Sat phone in the plane?"

"Not if it didn't interfere with your FAA required avionics. Matter of fact I've got a list of FAA approved systems. I'm really glad you and Bill are becoming friends. I've known him for 10 years, and he's always been a straight shooter, and he's a member of our church."

"Dan, he invited me to the Christian Businessman's prayer breakfast Saturday. How about if I stay overnight and go to your church Sunday morning?"

"Ron that would be an excellent idea. You need a break or you're going to burn out."

"OK Dan, see you Sunday." Dan gave Ron the address of his church and the time for the Sunday Service. Ron asked him if he'd be overdressed wearing a suit. Dan said that almost everyone at least wore a tie, so a suit wouldn't be too overdressed. He knew Bill always wore a suit, but being a CEO the only time he wasn't wearing a suit was when he played golf because the jacket interfered with his swing. Ron asked if Bill were into guns. Dan nodded vigorously, and that gave Ron an idea. He thanked Dan and walked back to his plane and flew home to Allakaket. Ron packed an overnight bag and a garment bag, and flew to Anchorage early Saturday morning, and met Bill at the Alaska Airlines offices, and they drove over together in his corporate limousine. They had a good talk on the way over, and Ron told him he could comfortably reduce ticket prices 20% since Bill got the fuel company to renegotiate their contract, and reduced their fuel costs 30%. It seemed the President of the company was unaware that one of his Vice Presidents wasn't holding the line on fuel prices to Alaska Airlines and Allakaket Airlines. They had plenty of profit from their retail distributors, so they didn't need to bump their price 30% when their costs had only gone up 10%. The vice president was now looking for another job. When Bill pointed out they had a fixed price contract, their fuel

distributor was nervous that they'd cancel their contract and they would basically be out of business. Bill suggested they extend the agreement to their feeder airline, and the president agreed in a heartbeat, since they were their second-biggest customer. He e-mailed a fixed-price contract to Ron's attention, and Ron forwarded it to his accountant. He entered the numbers into a spreadsheet, and the worst-case scenario would be a 20% reduction in annual profit from \$100 Thousand to \$80 thousand. Ron could live with that. The best-case scenario would be an increase in profit to \$120 thousand depending on how much the volume increased. Since reducing ticket prices would basically be profit-neutral, he authorized a cross-the-board reduction in ticket prices by 20%, effective next season.

When he got to the meeting, Ron recognized several movers and shakers in Anchorage. They had a rotating schedule of ministers delivering the message each meeting, and then a period for testimonies and prayer requests. Eventually they got down to the serious business of networking, and finally they ate. Ron thought the Episcopalian minister who delivered the message was exceptionally good. When it came time for Prayer requests, all he could think of was to ask for God's blessing and guidance in his life and his business. Several senior members were nodding in approval. Afterward, Bill was introducing Ron around, and he was handing out plenty of business cards, and collecting one from each member. Ron was amazed at how many business owners were Christians in Anchorage, and later Bill told him that only 1/3 were Born Again, but the rest were really good people who he could trust. Ron took out his stack of business cards, and asked Bill which ones were born again, and he put a BA notation on their cards. Bill didn't ask why, and Ron didn't volunteer. Ron asked Bill if he liked Long range shooting. Bill asked "How Long?" Ron said he had a rifle that could shoot a 12" or better group at 1,000 yards. Bill's eyes bugged out - he'd heard about the Barretts Light 50, but he never had an opportunity to shoot one. Ron told him that he was working on a T&E project for Barretts and JSOC, and had 2 Barrett's rifles. He told Bill that if he wanted to shoot them, he could meet him and fly to Elmendorf AFB which had a 1,000 yard range. Bill almost said "how about tomorrow", but decided that missing church wouldn't earn him any brownie points with Ron, and he probably didn't bring them with him. He made a note to have his secretary check his schedule, and block out an afternoon next week if he could to go shooting. Bill asked Ron where he was staying, and the limousine dropped him off at the inn. Bill suggested another hotel in downtown Alaska, but Ron said this one was fine, since he couldn't see the décor while he slept. Bill had to laugh, but reminded Ron that if he ever needed a business meeting in Anchorage, or to put a VIP up, the other hotel would be a better idea. Ron agreed, and thanked Bill for everything. As soon as he got to his room, he got out of the monkey suit, and into comfortable clothes. He had a day to kill, and decided to spend part of it at the Sporting goods store, since Larry the manager was at the meeting this morning.

Ron took a cab to the store, and Larry was there to greet him. "Ron, I didn't know you were a Christian?"

"Larry, that makes two of us."



“What are you in the market for today?”

“Just looking really, I need to kill some time.”

“OK, if you need anything, either Dave or I will help you.”

“Thanks Larry.”

Ron looked around, but didn't see anything he really needed or wanted. He asked Larry if he were up for a rematch. Since it was slow at the store, he agreed. Two hours later, Larry couldn't believe he'd been beaten twice by a 17 yr old kid, and he'd been practicing. Ron refused to take his money this time since he was playing for fun. Larry suggested a couple of places Ron could go that afternoon, so Ron was able to comfortably kill the rest of the day playing tourist.

The next morning after breakfast he got dressed in his best suit and tie, and caught a cab to the church. He spotted Dan, and he motioned to Ron to come sit with his family. He introduced the wife and kids, then they made small talk until they started the service. Ron spotted Bill entering the church 5 minutes before the service started, but there was no room to have Bill sit next to him. Ron did notice several young lovelies in the congregation, but didn't pay that much attention to them. After the service, Ron met the pastor, and it was the same guy who was at the Christian Businessman's prayer meeting. Ron said “Small world Reverend Jones.”

“Don't I know you from somewhere?” When Pastor Jones looked up and saw Bill Ayer, he remembered when he had seen Ron before. “You're Ron Williams, I saw you yesterday at the Christian Businessman's Prayer breakfast. Don't you own Allakaket Airlines?”

“Yes sir, thanks for remembering. I really liked the message you gave yesterday.”

“Why thank you Ron. I try especially hard at the Prayer meetings, because that might be the only chance I have to witness to some people.”

“Reverend, I'd like to come to your church more often if you'd like. I don't know if I can make every Sunday since I have to fly in from Allakaket, but I can be here at least twice a month.”

“Ron, just come whenever you can. Bill tries to make it several times a month, but business meetings and stuff sometimes take him out of town for the weekend, so I understand.”

After getting introduced to the pastor, Bill took Ron aside. “There are a whole bunch of single women in this church, but I found out early on that several of them are wolves in sheep's clothing, and only wanted to become “Mrs. Alaska Airlines” and they'll probably do the same to you. I printed up a list of the ones to watch out for, and a list of the ones you might want to get to know. Other than that, you're on your own buddy.”

“Thanks Bill, I noticed several women giving me the eye during the services.”

“Those are probably the ones to watch out for.”

On the way out, Ron took out his checkbook and wrote a check payable to the St. John’s Episcopal Church, and dropped it in the offering box.

Since Bill had his limousine handy, he offered Ron a ride back to the inn, which he gratefully accepted. Several female barracudas noticed as well.

Ron packed his bags, then checked out of the hotel. When he went out to catch a cab, he noticed an unfamiliar vehicle, but it was driven by one of the women from church that Bill had ID’d as one of the Female Barracudas. She flounced out of the vehicle, and put on her best “sexy” routine. Ron wasn’t buying it. “Need a lift Ron?”

“No thanks, they already called a cab.”

“I can take you anywhere you want to go.”

“Sorry sister, but I don’t want what you’re offering.”

Realizing that Ron was no dummy, and realizing she was beat, she stomped back to her Corvette and burned rubber. When the cab arrived a minute later the scent of burnt rubber still lingered in the air. Ron got in, told the cabbie to take him to the private Alaska Airlines terminal. The cabbie was curious but drove. Why would anyone with any business there take a cab?” The gate guard stopped them, but when Ron rolled down his window, the guard waved them through. Ron told him to pull up next to the Amphibian with the Allakaket Airlines logo on it, then the cabbie recognized him, and wondered why the owner of Allakaket Airlines was riding in a cab. Ron got out and paid the cabbie, then carried his bags to the TurboGoose. Again there was a note on the cockpit door. Ron was going to have to tell Bill to skip the notes, and if he felt like servicing the aircraft, just go ahead, otherwise he would gas up on the way to the runway. It wasn’t like he was ungrateful, it just irked him that Bill would stick these notes on his plane telling him all the nice things he was doing for him. After all, it was only \$100 worth of fuel, and a plane wash was only \$20 dollars unless they hand detailed it.

Ron looked at his watch, and realized he had all of Sunday afternoon free, and decided to visit his mom and dad, so he programmed the Nav system for the coordinates of his parent’s house. For all intents and purposes, he had moved out of home, even though he was still several months short of his 18<sup>th</sup> birthday. His parents appreciated the privacy and the solitude, and he appreciated the ability to come and go as he wanted. His house was small with a kitchen, small living room, and a master bedroom with a master bathroom. He kept it clean, but it wasn’t spotless by any means. He did his laundry at the town Laundromat once a week, and drove a small diesel pickup that Bill wasn’t using anymore back and forth to the hangar where they kept

the Goose. Ron was glad that the hangar was so big, with the 50 foot wingspan, 40 foot length and 12 foot height. Ron used the pickup as a mule to tow the TurboGoose into and out of the hangar, which was safer than starting the engines inside the hangar and risking the prop tips on the door clearance, which was only a foot higher than the prop tips. 15 minutes away from his parent's home, he called his Dad and said he was 15 minutes out. Since he couldn't taxi the big plane all the way to their house and turn around again, he'd have to beach it and walk, so it would take about half an hour for him to get to their front door. Ron made a textbook short field landing, but didn't reverse the props as hard since he had plenty of room. He taxied to the lakeshore in front of their cabin, and extended the landing gear so he could have the plane on dry land since he was still wearing good clothes. He hiked to his parent's house, and Anne greeted him with a big warm hug. Roy got up off the rocker to hug his son, then sat back down. Ron saw that his Dad really didn't look to good, but thought it was just old age. Lucky's greeting was to sit up to let Ron scratch behind his ears, then he laid back down on his rug. Ron spent the rest of the afternoon talking to his parents and visiting, making sure everything was OK with them. When he was ready to go, Anne walked him outside.

"Ron, I'm sure you noticed your Dad's condition. He refuses to see a doctor, and says he's lived long enough. You better go in there and say anything you want to say to him, because I'm not sure he'll live much longer."

Anne stayed outside to give them some privacy, and when Ron came back out, Anne could see he was crying. "Thanks Mom, I'm glad I got to say goodbye."

"Ron, he's going home. You shouldn't be here when he goes, or he might hold on long enough for you to leave, so be prepared for news that he died. He's already told me he wants to be buried here next to Oliver. There's enough room next to him for me, so when I go, bury me next to your father."

"Mom, I hope that's going to be a really long time."

Mother and son held each other for a while as she contemplated life without Roy, and he contemplated life without his Dad. They both were crying when they heard a gasp and a groan. By the time they got back into the cabin, Roy was dead. Ron checked for respiration and pulse, but his dad was gone. They fell to their knees in prayer, asking God to take care of him, then Ron rolled Roy into a caribou skin as he had requested, dug a deep hole next to Oliver, and gently laid his dad to rest. After Ron filled in the hole, he laid a simple marker on it:

Roy Williams  
1930 - 2004  
John 3:16  
RIP

Ron asked Anne if she wanted to stay at the cabin or go to Allakaket. She said she would rather

do her mourning in private, and she'd call when she wanted Ron to move her to Allakaket and close up the house.

Ron made the loneliest walk of his life. He spent the walk thinking about his Dad, and all the things he remembered. When he got to the plane, he turned to face his dad's grave and said "Vaya Con Dios, Dad." then he turned and climbed aboard the Goose and flew back to Allakaket. When he landed, he told Bill that Roy died that afternoon, and they buried him next to the cabin, right next to Oliver just like he requested. Bill gave Ron a hug, then said "Ron, I have something to give you, can you come with me?" Bill drove him to his office, and unlocked the door, then opened a safe and extracted a large manila envelope. It simply said "Ron Williams". Inside was his father's will, a final letter, and his savings passbook. The letter read:

Dear Ron:

If you are reading this, I'm dead and in heaven. The cabin and the property around it are yours, do not sell it for any reason. You will want to keep it just in case. If your mom wants to live there, let her live there as long as she wants. Enclosed is my savings passbook. I've already transferred enough money to Anne's account to ensure that she will live comfortably for the rest of her life. Hopefully I lived long enough to see you grown up. I know you will be a good man, because you were a good kid. I'm so proud of you. Take care of your mother.

Love,

Dad

Ron broke down and cried all over again. He'd rather have his Dad back than the money. He opened the passbook and the last entry showed a balance of half a million dollars. He looked at Bill, and said "Just how much money did my Dad have?"

"When he left instructions a few years ago to split his passbook between you and Anne, he had a little over a million dollars in the account. He made some very good investments over the years, and really made his money work for him. Between her money and half of Roy's account, your mom has over  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a million in the bank, and that will last forever up here, she could live on the interest, and never touch the principal."

"Bill, is there any land around Allakaket for sale that I could buy with this money and build a new house. I'm pretty sure my mom wants to live in town after she's done mourning for dad, so I was going to give her Jim's house."

"Ron, there's 10 acres of prime real estate on the edge of town that backs into a forest, and it would be a prefect building lot. How big of a house do you want?"

“Just to be on the safe side, let’s say 3,000 square feet, 4 bedroom, 3 baths, full basement, two-story with fireplaces, a solar roof, and a full AE system. I can pay cash for anything, but I need it built quickly.”

“Ron, there are plenty of out of work builders in town who would love to earn the money, and would work fast.”

“Bill, who owns the forest behind the lot?”

“It’s state land, so you could buy it cheap.”

“How big is the property behind it - I was thinking of buying the whole thing.”

“There’s 100 acres back there of heavily wooded forest that would make excellent wood for a fireplace or to build a house out of.”

“Work up the numbers, and let me know. I want to buy it all, and I need a house built with a septic system, running hot and cold water and electrical service.”

“Ok Ron, it’s your money, but I can tell you right now, what you have in mind will cost between 100 and 250 thousand dollars.”

“Here’s 500 Thousand, put the change in my account.”

Ron turned and walked out and spent the rest of the day wandering around Allakaket. He walked out to the property, and it was beautiful. He would have a nice large house, with plenty of room for kids, a garden, and enough trees to keep it warm for 100 years.

2 weeks later, his mom called to tell him Lucky died. He flew up there to bury his dog next to Sam, and check on his Mom. She was as OK as could be expected, so he flew back to Allakaket later that afternoon. Ron approved the plans for his new house, and 90 days later, it was done. It had Solar panel roofing on the southern exposure, a half-dozen Air-X wind turbines, a heliostat water heater backed up by a wood burning hot water heater, and 4 interconnected stone masonry heater fireplaces. Each room was bigger than some people’s houses, but they didn’t mind since Ron had the money, and they were making a good living building Ron’s dream house. They put the AE system in the basement, as well as a 10KW backup diesel generator. They buried a 2,000 gallon diesel tank deep outside below the frost line, and treated the diesel so it wouldn’t freeze or go bad. His battery bank was big enough to run the house for 24 hours with no other inputs, and he bought all the inverters and gear from Outback Power systems including a 20KW inverter bank, controllers and everything else he needed. He even put in a deep well in an insulated well house so he could have year-round hot and cold running water. He had a wood cook stove attached to the masonry heater in the kitchen, but the rest of the kitchen was totally modern including a commercial stove/range that

ran on propane, a huge refrigerator, and several freezers . They built another insulated building to house a 2,000 gallon propane tank. Ron had located a supplier for propane that was crazy enough to fly a tank full of propane from Anchorage to Allakaket. The reason for the huge tank was that they would only deliver during the summer, since it was too dangerous during the winter. The basement consisted of storage, and several gun safes that were bolted to the floor, and enclosed in their own rooms. Now all he needed was a wife.

**The End**

**Continued in the next book “Allakaket Airlines”**